

Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

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Editorial Comments

Steve Iliffe

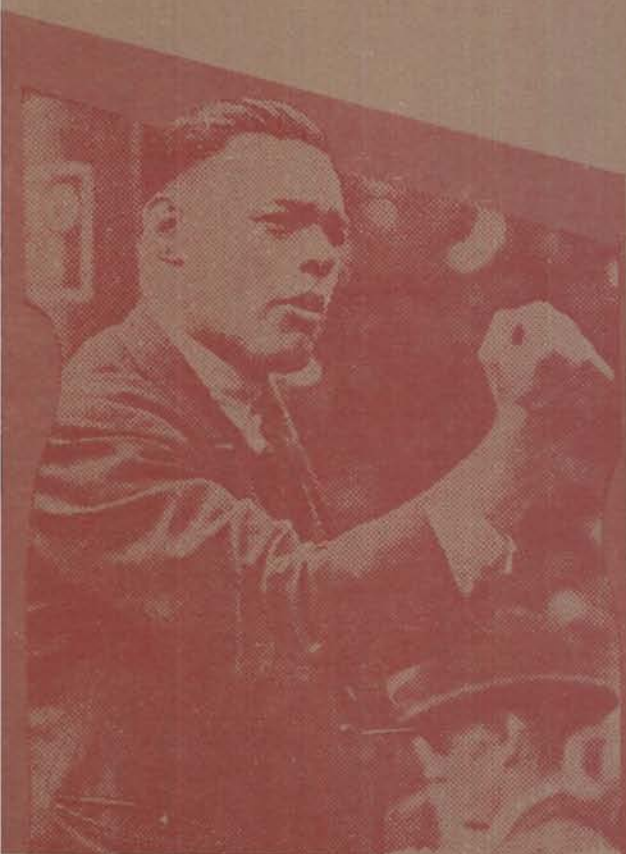
Health Care and the
Medical Profession

Frank Chane

Systems Thinking and All That

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The Relationship between Marxist
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Struggles
in the
Thirties

An Exchange on Proportional Representation:

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Volume 19, Number 3

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The front cover was designed by Pat Cook. The pictures in the text and on the cover come from the Wal Hannington papers.

SOME ARTICLES PLANNED FOR APRIL-JUNE ISSUES

Joan Bellamy	Imperialism and the Third World
E. A. Bitsakis	Relativism and Relativity
Donald Cameron	Problems of Heredity
Bill Carr	Memories of the General Strike
Gerardo Chiaromonte	Togliatti and the Great Components of Italian Society: Communists, Socialists and Catholics
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Jack Lindsay	The Role of the Individual in Art
Gavin Mackenzie	Class and Class Consciousness: Marx Re-examined
Georgio Napolitano	Party, Working Class and Intellectuals
Mike Prior	More on Inflation
Barry Stacey	The Marxist View of Human Nature
John Thompson	The Dialectics of Nature
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Editorial Comments

EVERY day brings new reports of factory closures here, short time working there. The *Tribune* group of MPs states that continuation of the Government's general economic policy will mean that "before the end of the year there will be a million unemployed—perhaps 1,500,000".

Alongside this, inflation continues to compel workers to fight for wage increases to keep pace with constant price and other increases (rates, fares, gas and electricity charges, school meals etc.).

This fight, however, is made more difficult by two factors. First, the monotonous repetition on all hands of the argument that wage increases are a major cause of inflation. Second, that the fight for wage increases above a certain "norm" violates the "social contract" entered into by the Government and the TUC and is therefore irresponsible, selfish, wicked.

Clarity about the relation of wage increases to inflation and what the "social contract" really involves is therefore essential if the Labour movement is to prevent attempts being made to solve the economic crisis at the expense of the workers.

Such clarity is provided by Bert Ramelson in his latest pamphlet.¹ This examines the background to the present crisis, especially to the crisis of the British economy, outlines the fundamental causes of inflation, analyses the implications of the "social contract" in great detail and advances the alternative policy of the Communist Party to deal with the crisis in ways which puts the burden on the big monopoly capitalists. The essence of his case—supported by many convincing facts, figures, quotations from speeches from supporters of the "contract"—is that it is a device for keeping wages down and making the trade union movement a policeman to enforce "voluntary" wage restraint.

He quotes Len Murray speaking in November last and saying "... in the main wage settlements were considerably below what they would have been but for the 'Social Contract' (p. 7).

"The Social Contract", writes Bert Ramelson, accepts the basic assumption that there can be no improvement in living standards

¹ The Social Contract—cure-all or con trick. Communist Party, 15p.

over the next few years ... (it) is tantamount to acquiescing in a stagnant economy and is bound to lead to increased unemployment" (p. 20).

A FIELD-MARSHAL IN THE FAMILY

Congratulations to *Labour Research* for its factual study of the British Army in its last December issue.²

The army comprises the largest sector of Britain's armed forces, employing 171,705 out of the total of 349,269 armed personnel. Of these about 40,000 are stationed in the United Kingdom.

It is interesting that now, well into the 1970s the "tightly-knit and exclusive army social background" of the higher echelons of the army has hardly changed from when Harvey and Hood wrote the first Marxist study of the British State in the mid-1950s.³

Out of the 107 top-ranking officers who constitute the leadership of the British army (field-m Marshals, generals, lieutenant-generals and major-generals) 88 went to public school (14 per cent to Wellington College alone), and half were born into or married into families containing army officers.

Although, as we are so often told, any foundry worker can become a field-marshal and any miner a major-general, somehow Eton, Oxbridge, and a good military pedigree appear to be of some advantage.

The article makes some interesting observations about the recruitment and conditions of employment of the rank-and-file soldiers. Legal measures like the Incitement to Disaffection Act still operate to prevent military personnel from engaging in any trade union activity. Despite recent efforts to make the army into an elite force, the areas from which a large section of soldiers are recruited are zones of traditionally high unemployment.

Interesting points are raised about the theories of some senior army personnel (and also of some well-known Tory politicians) concerning the role of the army in maintaining public order.

In the past some years of experience of "putting down the natives" abroad in the

² *The British Army* in *Labour Research*, December 1974, pp. 242-244.

³ Harvey and Hood, *The British State*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1958.

colonial services, were considered a satisfactory training for senior police officials who would have to "put down the natives" at home. Men like Brigadier F. Kitson (author of *Low Intensity Operations*) stress the importance of making "the army ready to deal with subversion, insurrection or peace-keeping operations during the second half of the 1970s".

The relation of the army to the police is considered to be in need of reinforcement, and the "fight against terrorism" is being used as a pretext.

And it should be a matter of the deepest concern to the Labour movement, that, under this eighth Labour Government, the *capitalist* character of the British state is in fact being strengthened, instead of firm measures for its democratisation.

"HE CAME, HE SAW, HE WAS CONQUERED"

We must thank the *Labour Research*, too, for continuing the examination of the British State in the first issue of 1975. This time it turned its attention to the civil service⁴.

There are around 700,000 civil servants in the UK today and, as the *Labour Research* notes, "their increasing militancy has been significant in trade union affairs in recent years".

But the powerful people at the top, are members, if organised at all, of the First Division Association. There are 600 men and women of under-secretary rank or above (under-secretary, deputy secretary, permanent secretary) who form this elite.

They are the permanent policy makers. Ministers come and Ministers go, but they go on.

In the words of the Fulton Report on the Civil Service (Cmnd 36381, June 1968):—

"they prepare plans and advice on policy . . . ; they prepare legislation and assist ministers with its passage through Parliament; they draft regulations and answers to parliamentary questions, they produce briefs for debates".

The Ministers of the First Labour Government were very rapidly taken over by their more permanent state officials⁵. Sir Percy

James Grigg wrote of Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, that "an experienced and sober civil servant" described him as "the ideal of what a Minister should be". On Arthur Henderson at the Home Office, his biographer, Mary Agnes Hamilton, wrote:—"if he enjoyed work in the Home Office . . . the reason was in part, that in his permanent secretary, Sir John Anderson, he found a great chief of staff. . . . There was very soon a very good mutual understanding between the two".

As for Ramsay MacDonald, the Foreign Office, quickly swallowed him up. He "is the easiest Foreign Secretary I have ever had to manage", declared a leading F.O. official. Said another commentator—"He came, he saw, he was conquered"⁶.

"CUT OFF AND SURROUNDED"

The *Labour Research* article describes the take over by senior civil servants of Labour Ministers in later Labour Governments, but the most recent evidence was afforded in the first serialised section of "The Crossman Diaries" in the *Sunday Times*⁷.

Richard Crossman was appointed Minister of Housing on Saturday, October 17.

He writes on October 22, that sitting in his office room:—

"I realise the tremendous effort it requires not to be taken over by the Civil Service. My Minister's room is like a padded cell, and in certain ways I am like a person who is suddenly certified a lunatic and put safely into this great vast room, cut off from real life and surrounded by male and female trained nurses".

There I sit, he continues:—

"insulated from the world, with things and people presented to me in the way the Ministry of Housing and Local Government wishes to present them".

On October 27 he writes:—

"The whole Department is there to support the Minister. . . . Everything is done to sustain him in the line which officials think he should take. . . . There is a constant debate as to how the Minister should be advised or, shall we say, directed and pushed and cajoled into the line required by the Ministry".

As Marxists have always maintained, the key positions of the state are occupied by

⁴ *Labour Research*, January 1975, pp. 2-5, "The Power of the Civil Service".

⁵ See James Klugmann—*History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, vol. I, pp. 273-278. "The Labour Government and the Capitalist State".

⁶ Above quotations in James Klugmann, *ibid*.

⁷ *Sunday Times*, January 26th, 1975.

people, carefully selected from those who through birth, background, education and indoctrination, are loyal to the capitalist class, and, who, whether or not they are conscious of what they are doing, zealously endeavour to make sure that it is the Ministries that run the Ministers—and not the reverse.

"MARXISM TODAY" STUDIES THE STATE

Articles are being prepared for *Marxism Today* on such subjects as: "Marxism, Reformism and the State"; "Monopoly Capitalism and the Authoritarian Trend"; "Problems of Parliament and Power"; "The British Armed Forces"; "The Police"; "The Civil Service"; "Marxism and the Law"; "The Economic Role of the British State"; "The Fight for Democracy"; "The Social Services, Local Government and the State";

We hope to publish these and other studies on related problems in the course of the coming year. Suggestions from readers—for other articles on the State—would be very welcome.

MARXIST STUDIES OF THE STATE IN FRANCE

Whilst on the problem of the state, we should like to recommend readers of French to get hold of the special issue of the Bulletin of the Maurice Thorez Institute in Paris on questions of the state,⁸ published in mid-1974.

The studies deal mainly with the French state, and with the position of the French Communist Party, between 1926-1948.

Serge Wolikov writes on "State and Society in France, 1926-1937"; Germaine Willard on "The Question of Institutions in 1943"; Annie Lacroix on "The Nationalisation of Electricity and Gas"; Jean Paul Scot on "State, Institutions and Class Struggle, 1944-45"; and there is a Round Table Discussion on "Communists in the Government, 1944-47".

On more general problems related to the state, Roger Martelli writes on "Lenin and State Power, 1905-1907"; Jean Gacon on the function of the President of the Republic in the French state, and Daniel Blume on "Some Problems of the State in the Formation of State Monopoly Capitalism".

⁸ "Quelques Questions de l'Etat", *Cahiers d'Histoire*, No. 6, 1974, Institut Maurice Thorez, 64 Boulevard Auguste-Blanqui, Paris 13e, 300 pp., 30 F.

The various studies serve to underline the point made by Richard Lagache in the introductory essay that questions of the state are, under capitalism, more and more a central question of modern political struggle.

DEATH OF HANS HESS

We had only just sent to the press the review article of the magnificent book on George Grosz by Hans Hess, when we received the sad news of his death.

Hans was born in Germany in 1908. His father was a collector of modern painting in the Weimar Republic, and Hans learned much of painting and painters as a young man.

With Hitler in power, he emigrated to Paris in May 1933 and moved thence to Britain.

In 1935 he was one of the editors of the anti-fascist journal *Inside Nazi Germany* (later *Germany Today*).

In the late 30s he often lectured for the Left Book Club. He was one of the founders of the Free German League of Culture. He was interned in 1940, and after release from internment turned to museum work, first in Leicester and then in York, where he became Curator of the City Art Gallery.

In the early 1950s he became Chief Director of the York Festival. In the last eight years of his life he lectured at Sussex University, where, on his death, he was Reader in the History and Theory of Art.

In 1959 he published a monograph on Lionel Feininger. In 1974 Studio Vista published his work on George Grosz⁹. Chatto & Windus (for the Sussex University Press) will be publishing in a few months his *Pictures as Arguments*.

We printed in the October 1973 issue of *Marxism Today* his thought-provoking article "Is there a Theory of Art in Marx?", and he lectured on questions of Marxism and Aesthetics at the 1974 Communist University, one of his last lectures before illness overtook him.

He was due to write for us again, this time, more specifically, on George Grosz, but his ill-health prevented him.

As man, teacher, Marxist theoretician, he will be deeply missed.

⁹ Hans Hess—George Grosz, Studio Vista, £9.50. We apologise that this title and the name of the publisher were omitted from last month's review article. A translation is being prepared for publication in the German Democratic Republic.

(Concluded on page 96)

Health Care and the Medical Profession

Steve Iliffe

(The author is a Junior Hospital Doctor working in London)

At one time or another the whole question of health care is of personal concern to us all. That alone makes it a topic worth close attention. More specifically, the current conflicts within the health service are a revealing window on to wider social and political affairs. The Marxist truism that monopoly capitalism drives even its own middle strata into alliance with the working class can be critically evaluated by a close look at the health professions; and the consequences of the Social Democrat's careful complicity with the ideology of the dominant class are charted by the progressive crisis in the National Health Service. In looking at the politics of health care we examine an institution that was, at its creation, a "victory for the working class" and that has become, with the failure of post-war reformism, a state institution that each class seeks to capture and control. The politics of class society extend into its financing, its control and administration, the selection and education of its staff, the treatment of its patients and the "science" upon which medicine itself is based.

These notes will concentrate on one aspect of health care—the position of the health professions, and in particular the politics of the dominant group, the medical profession.

Ties with the Ruling Class

The medical profession in Britain has strong ties with the ruling class. In part, these ties consist of their overlapping cultural, social and educational experience. Recruitment into the medical profession has always been from a tiny, privileged minority and there is some evidence that this has become increasingly so.¹ A significant proportion of students admitted to medical schools come from families in which at least one member is a doctor; the vast majority come from professional or managerial backgrounds. The institutions of the profession are not unaware of their class allegiance. The Royal College of Surgeons in evidence to the Pilkington Commission in 1958 stated:

"There has always been a nucleus in medical schools of students from cultured homes...."

¹ *Royal Commission on Medical Education 1965-68*: HMSO: 1968.

This nucleus has been responsible for the continued high social prestige of the profession as a whole and for the maintenance of medicine as a learned profession. Medicine would lose immeasurably if the proportion of such students were to be reduced in favour of the precocious children who qualify for subsidies from the Local Authorities and the State purely on examination results."

A study of the social background and academic performance of students at a major London teaching hospital in 1971 revealed that:

Only 5.6 per cent of students came from social classes 3, 4 and 5 (which constitute 82 per cent of the total population).

33 per cent had one parent in medicine. Only 0.1 per cent of the population can claim such parentage.

56.7 per cent of doctors' offspring were asked to obtain less than three "C" grades at A-level. Only 29.5 per cent of the remaining students were asked to obtain less than three "C" grades.

Distribution of Resources

This unrepresentative social background from which the medical profession is drawn influences both the standards of care given to patients and the distribution of resources in the NHS. In particular, the origins and allegiances of the profession lead it to:

(a) concentrate on hospital care (the secondary sector) rather than community-based medicine (primary sector), although both effective prevention of disease and early treatment require that priority be given to the primary sector;²

(b) concentrate both primary and secondary sector facilities in areas where they are least needed to the detriment of areas where facilities are inadequate;³

(c) concentrate facilities in close association with private practice: the constellation of highly specialised teaching hospitals around London's Harley Street is evidence of this.

² Townsend: "Inequality and the Health Service". *Lancet*, June 15, 1974.

³ Hart, J.: "The Inverse Care Law", *Lancet*, April 21, 1971.

Other relations—both political and commercial—link the medical profession to the bourgeoisie. Only a tiny minority of doctors have leading positions in commercial and industrial concerns supplying the health service; but the prominence of these men in the organisations of the medical profession and in its political lobbies is sufficient to give the entire profession a reactionary character.⁴

Medical Business Interests in the NHS

A second bond links the profession to the ruling class; the sharing of power between medical and business interests in the running of the NHS. Before the reorganisation of the health service in April 1974, hegemony was exerted by the medical profession, doctors constituting the single largest occupational grouping within the controlling bodies of the NHS. The reorganisation displaced doctors in favour of company directors; although the medical profession remains well entrenched on controlling bodies, its formal representation has been considerably reduced. This shift in the balance of power is itself significant, in that it indicates that the alliance of profession and ruling class is not without its own internal conflicts.

The medical profession has always guarded its knowledge and skills against all comers—the bourgeoisie and its State included. Conversely the State has long had an interest in reducing medical power within the NHS administration, and through the 1974 reorganisation achieved an aim set out by the Guillebaud Committee in 1956—the reduction of medical representation on governing bodies from a majority or near-majority to no more than 25 per cent.

Funding of Scientific Debate

A third relationship binding the profession and the delivery of care to capital is the funding of scientific debate within medicine by the pharmaceutical and supply companies. Profits from drug firms are used to advertise extensively in the journals of medical science, thereby ensuring a degree of financial stability within medical publishing. Medical conferences are similarly sponsored, as are research programmes and arrangements "... in which the industrial scientist lectures on specialist subject matter for perhaps a halfday week. ... It provides a valuable insight into current university thinking and gives industry an entrée for the development of relations essential to it."⁵ The lavish and partisan publicity

material that all too often serves as the doctor's main guide to drug prescribing is financed from the profits extracted from the NHS by the drug monopolies.⁶

A Variable Relationship

If the close alliance between the medical profession and monopoly capitalism is a clear political fact, then the distinction between the profession and the bourgeoisie is equally evident.⁷ While the medical profession may serve the ruling class, it also serves its own members; the interests of each group do not necessarily correspond, and may even conflict. The variability of this relationship between medicine and capital is indicated by the two major changes that have occurred recently within the health care system:

(1) The State has forced a redistribution of power within the health service towards a consolidation of commercial interests and an increase in centralised control and the influence of administrators;

(2) a concomitant growth in private medicine has also taken place both inside and outside the NHS. This growth has not been due to an expansion in the numbers of private doctors (in fact, the numbers have fallen), but due to the increasingly efficient organisation of private patients in health insurance schemes.

If that nexus of relationships to the ruling class were the sole basis for the medical profession's activity the political outlook for the NHS would be bleak. Fortunately, the establishment of a state health service has had repercussions within the medical profession that oppose current attempts to stabilise existing allegiances.

Some Progressive Trends

Firstly, a generation of doctors have grown up as salaried State employees within the secondary sector, whilst the number of private practitioners has dwindled. Whilst individual power and professional isolation are still large components of medical practice, the transformation of a part of the profession into workers in a nationalised industry cannot but erode professional exclusiveness. The logical alternative for the profession is to seek some kind of alliance with other hospital workers against their common enemy. That prospect is distant at the moment, but given an effort

⁶"Take a Pill: the Drug Industry, private or public?" *Marxists in Medicine*, 1973.

⁷"The bourgeoisie ... has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers", Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

⁴*Labour Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2, Feb., 1973.

⁵Medico-Pharmaceutical Forum: Final Report of the Forum's Committee on Academic and Industrial Relationships: 1971.

by the medical left to circumvent the ideological barriers of professionalism, it is attainable.

Secondly, the increasing specialisation and technicality of medical science means that no single group of health workers can legitimately claim control of health care. In addition, the reduced importance of acute illness and the increased part played by chronic disease put the emphasis on preventative and "caring" medical treatment rather than dramatic "cures", with consequent involvement of different skills.

Thirdly, the increasing standards of public education and the demonstration of the non-scientific basis of much medical treatment previously portrayed as scientific has reduced the capacity of the profession to control all aspects of treatment. This in turn is forcing a "renegotiation" of the terms of the doctor-patient relationship in favour of reciprocal understanding, and away from unilateral decision-making.

Fourthly, the expansion of medical science that accompanied the creation of State-run health care schemes has allowed the complex relationships of illness to social and occupational conditions to be more fully understood. The awareness that medical care alone is insufficient, and that political and social changes are preconditions for improving health, is gaining ground; scientific medicine increasingly implicates monopoly capitalism in the causation of disease, and thereby militates against a continued professional alliance with private enterprise.

Fragmentation of the Profession

The consequence of the co-existence of such contradictory tendencies within medicine is the fragmentation of a profession whose unity was so laboriously created in the 19th century. Currently four organisations represent medical interests:

1. The British Medical Association, which is the largest organisation, is traditionally conservative (it opposed the 1911 and 1948 Health Acts that formed the basis of the health service), and is dominated by the private practice lobby.
2. The Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association, with half the nation's 8,000 consultants as members (although membership overlaps with the BMA), is heavily committed to defending private practice and consultant "status" (power).
3. The Junior Hospital Doctors Association, like the HCSA, is a break-away from the BMA; it has just negotiated an alliance with the HCSA.
4. The Medical Practitioners Union (a section of ASTMS)—essentially a progressive

medical trades union.

The political divisions within medicine are even more numerous, with a number of issue-oriented pressure groups, private practice lobbies, the Socialist Medical Association and relief organisations like Medical Aid for Vietnam, and GAMMA (Guinea, Angola and Mozambique Medical Aid).

Perspective

With the present upsurge in industrial activity within the National Health Service, the Communist Party faces the problem of assessing the political character of the medical profession as a whole, and creating a perspective for work in the health service that takes account of the singular features of this section of the middle strata. A number of points stand out:

1. The objective tendencies within medicine that threaten the old alliance of profession and capital prompt counter-moves from the ruling class—namely, increased centralised control, and increasing organisation of private medicine; in addition, successive governments attempt to avert economic crisis by diversion of finance away from social welfare and into privately-controlled industry. The defence of the existing health services could be seen only in terms of political mobilisation against, say, cuts in welfare spending. However, since such defensive politics and the evolution of new forms of organisation and activity within medicine are inter-related, there is also the possibility of pressing for structural reforms within medical care as an integral part of a defensive campaign. Such reforms would be aimed at deprofessionalisation within health care, and perhaps would include the ultimate goal of a single, united health workers' union to include all categories of health worker.

2. Whatever the political developments within medicine, there is no objective basis for a shift on the part of the *whole* profession from the side of the ruling class to that of the working class; the problem for the medical left is one of obtaining a division within the profession that is to the advantage of the Labour movement—in other words, a division that isolates the small minority with a direct financial stake in monopoly capitalism from those who are either committed to a State service alone, or in an ambiguous relationship to private enterprise. Such a division would seem to demand not only a programme of social reform that would deal with concrete problems within health care (and lead the medical profession into alliance with a broader popular movement), but also intervention by the left at a practical level to make specific local reforms that would serve as an example within medicine.

3. The professional isolation that aids the

alliance of the profession to the ruling class also constitutes a potential strength for the left, in that the relative autonomy of the fully qualified practising doctor allows a degree of experimentation in delivering services that is denied other State employees. That experimentation, and the debate that surrounds it, provides an opportunity for the left to demonstrate and test out at least some of the ideas included in a socialist concept of health care.

4. The outstanding feature of the health service is its disunity. The unification of its work-

force is the obvious precondition for obtaining the necessary improvement in health care, and as such demands some form of broad-based organisation that will evolve and develop a reform programme in conjunction with the Labour movement outside the health service. The creation of that organisation in turn requires an initiative by a Communist Party with an organisation that spans the health industry, and with a political approach that encourages maximum dialogue between the Labour movement, health workers and the professionalised middle strata.

Systems Thinking and All That

Frank Chane

Capitalism, as Marx first demonstrated scientifically, is based on the exploitation of the productive worker, on the extraction of surplus value. In order to pursue this objective it has employed the scientist and engineer, particularly during the present century, to devise new methods and new theories to justify the methods and help con the worker into co-operating in this exploitation. The present article reviews the last development in this field against its historical background.

I

Taylorism

Early industrialism arose on the crudest physical exploitation—the sort which, through *Capital* itself and a host of histories since, is now familiar to every socialist. But the fight of the workers, assisted by the most humanitarian bourgeois, produced a growing body of legislation designed to prevent the most brutal excesses. By the early part of this century, methods to extract more surplus value were needed to combat the increasing power of the workers to raise their share of the product.

The first major contribution came from a US engineer, F. W. Taylor, in what became known as “Scientific Management”. Scientific Management combined a study of the worker’s physical capabilities with the “theory” that the worker is driven to work overwhelmingly by the fear of hunger and the search for money. Crude Taylorism led to such extremes of work that it was attacked by an official US governmental report as not only producing such extremes but the debasement of the human being. For 60 per cent more pay, Taylor’s model worker produced 330 per cent more output. Modern refinements

of Taylorism still regard the factory as an organisation that can be managed on purely “scientific” i.e. mechanistic lines.

In sociological jargon, Scientific Management regards the factory as a formal organisation, in which all the individuals, especially the workers, have one purpose, which is to further the objects of the organisation. Conflict may not be a bad thing, provided it too can be used to further those objects. In the case of any capitalist organisation the paramount aim is, of course, the maximisation of profit.

“Human Relations”

The first world war, the need to maintain working class support for the war effort and, of course, the Russian Revolution, all dealt blows at crude Taylorism. It was no longer good enough to treat workers as mindless, money-grubbing moles. The industrial scientists found that workers actually displayed “human” characteristics. Experiments on site during the “twenties” and “thirties” led to a new school of “Human Relations”, again mainly under the leadership of an American, Elton Mayo. This school came to the following conclusions:

- (i) the worker’s work capacity was not determined simply by his physical capabilities but by what he as a member of his group decided;
 - (ii) other rewards, e.g. job satisfaction, were more important than money;
 - (iii) extreme specialisation was not necessarily the best division of labour;
 - (iv) communication, participation and leadership were very important factors in management/employee relations.
-

Like Scientific Management, Human Relations can chalk up a number of successes, chief of which in Britain is the organisation of the Glacier Metal Co., where a hierarchy of committees operates throughout the company and communication goes on both ways, up and down. Liberal Party talk about worker participation is simply Human Relations on a political platform. Its aim is to give the workers the illusion of power without altering the reality of capitalist ownership. Of course, such class collaborationism is not new: in one form or another it has been fostered for the last hundred years of capitalism. Human Relations merely gives it a pseudo-scientific basis. It propagates the idea that unions are not really necessary and that industrial problems are basically "psychological".

But if the psychological approach to industrial problems seemed good enough before the second world war, the post-war era showed its inadequacy. Workers during and after the war demanded and expected not merely "communication" but greater control over private industry, including nationalisation of key sectors, and a much higher standard of living. On top of this, by 1949, capitalism ceased to exist in one-third of the world and uncertainty and instability gradually increased. Scientific Management and Human Relations experts modified their theories to try to meet the new situation, the former embracing "psychological" factors, the latter including aspects of organisation theory. But something more obviously related to the new circumstances was badly needed.

Closed Systems

One very important theoretical feature of the new situation was the impact of Marxism. In sociological theory this helped give rise to the various "conflict" theorists, who argued that every system inevitably contained conflict within it and that the aim of those in authority, aided by their sociological advisers, should be to contain this conflict, to prevent it destroying the system. Automation and cybernetics (feed back) also demonstrated the universality of dialectics. In the study of the living organism, biologists like von Bertalanffy showed the vital importance of the interaction of organism and environment. These will be explained later.

Both Scientific Management and Human Relations experts dealt largely with "closed systems", systems that are cut off from whatever went on outside. In industry they examined the factory or plant and its organisation, the relationships between the workers and management and between the different levels of management. What happened outside was largely ignored or regarded

as of little consequence. Contrary to Marxist teaching, the factory was regarded as a "closed system", separate from the wider society in which it was placed. Study of the factory in this way could solve some problems, but the facts were driving some investigators to the realisation that it was not enough.

During the last century, the French engineer Carnot discovered the Second Law of Thermodynamics, a law at once almost childishly simple yet of immense practical and theoretical significance. Arising directly from the operation of the steam engine, it states that heat can be transformed into work but that no more work can be got out of any heat engine than the equivalent amount of heat put into it. To give perhaps the simplest example; no more steam pressure can come from a boiling kettle of water than the equivalent amount of heat going from the gas flame (or electricity) boiling it. This "law" might appear so obvious as to be a tautology (in bourgeois logic it would be) but it introduced the idea of something outside an input (the gas flame) altering the state of an apparently self-contained system (the kettle of water) and producing an output (steam pressure).

"Open Systems"

The Italian engineer-turned-sociologist, V. Pareto, used the 2nd Law to develop a grand theory of social change. The boiling kettle is, he argued, in a state of equilibrium: heat goes in, water boils, steam comes out; the "system" is in movement, but nothing in essence changes. All organisms, whether biological or social, are, he concluded, always in this state of "moving equilibrium". Pareto's theory is effectively an expansion of the French saying, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. The contemporary astronomer, Fred Hoyle's theory of the "steady state" of the universe is basically Paretian and an extension of the 2nd Law.

It was von Bertalanffy who drew the attention of biologists and other interested students to the importance of the idea of the "open system" in the study of organisms. A biological organism takes in raw materials, transforms them into living matter and energy to build itself and carry out its activities, and ejects waste substances. It is open to its environment. Influenced by Marxism, von Bertalanffy pointed out that this process raised the organism to a new level, transformed and improved.¹ The same end, he further emphasised, could be achieved by different routes, just as one may get to the same

¹L. von Bertalanffy: "The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology," in *Systems Thinking*, ed. F. E. Emery, Penguin.

destination by rail, bus, taxi or a combination of any two or all three of these. This he called the principle of equitinality.

The last major contribution to systems thinking came from cybernetics, the study of self-regulating systems. Cyberneticists regard the boiling kettle as a self-regulating system: the spout acts as a release valve for the steam, which would otherwise burst the kettle. In modern electric kettles that have a switch which automatically switches off the power when the water boils, the switch acts as a regulator. Automated industrial systems consist of certain stages, each stage connected to the next by self-acting mechanisms, usually built in with self-connecting means to eliminate errors. The whole complicated manufacturing process, e.g. of car parts or ball-bearings, involves constant feed-back, meaning that, as each stage is finished, a message passes instructions to carry out the next stage, or correcting instructions in case of error. In other words, feed-back means that at a critical stage a message goes to alter or adjust the system. This important essentially dialectical concept is crucial to systems thinking.

II

Trist's Theory

One of the stages towards the dialectical approach was the development by the industrial sociologist Trist of the idea of the Socio-Technical System, through his experiments during the 1950s, in the Durham coalfield, a traditionally right wing area.² In the old pre-mechanisation days in coalmining, the commonest work organisation was the small group of miners led by one man, who shared out both the work and the final wage-pocket.

The mechanical coalcutter put an end to this system. The machine worked along a coalface, often 50 yards or more. (In some coalfields, especially with thick seams, the longwall system even antedated the mechanical cutter.) The collier(s) cut the coal, which was shovelled on to the belt by others, the miners moved on, propping up the roof behind them. This team shared the money usually on a piecework basis. The next shift then had to fill up the gob (the vacant space) before being able to start coal-cutting and gob-filling paid at a lower rate. The result was frequent friction and argument between shifts.

Trist experimented with the three-shift system which re-introduced the pre-mechanisation group over the total work process; i.e. all shared the total proceeds. From this simple method of ending inter-shift friction he deduced that the

technology of any work process demanded a corresponding social organisation. Nothing new to a Marxist, but a discovery, nevertheless. In systems thinking terminology he had realised that mining had to be regarded as an Open System, where a steady state (of coal extraction) could be achieved if due account was taken of the technical demands of the work. Or, in Paretian concepts, he had produced a "moving equilibrium". Harmony reigned a little longer in that Durham pit.

Trist's theory is essentially bourgeois, like any theory which assumes that conflict situations within class societies can be overcome by a supposed common purpose. It is true that, for a period, Trist achieved harmony between shifts and a higher output (with higher pay). But no such achievement is permanently immune from external effects and internal stresses. No functional system is, in the language of the sociologists, free from "dysfunctions". There is no question of generalising from Trist's experiments to even the whole of coalmining, let alone to all British industry. Somewhere along the line would come such problems as what happens when the mine is worked to the finish, meeting miners' claims to yet higher pay commensurate with their importance to the community as compared, say, to property speculators and external factors like government fuel policy.

System Within a System

What these questions pose, therefore, is the problem of a society within a society, a system within a system. The US theorists Hirschman and Lindblom came to the interesting conclusion that no system or economy is ever quite finished, a view with which every Marxist would agree.³ And even Rasse, another American for whom systems analysis and systems planning are the solution to all the ills of the capitalist society, has to admit that, contrary to scientific management theory, there is no one "perfect way", no pure rationality. Adopting H. A. Simon's notion of "approximate rationality", he declares that no systems method involving simple quantitative prediction can solve such qualitative problems as how the economic product should be allocated.

This is precisely the thesis, argued in much detail, of the US Marxist economists, Baran and Sweezy in *Monopoly Capital*, that capitalism cannot solve the problem of disposing of the surplus value created by the working class. In 1965 another American, Lecht, calculated that, in order to make up for capitalism's social failings, health expenditure by 1975 would have to

² E. L. Trist et al, *Organizational Choice*, 1963.

³ Hirschman and Lindblom, "Economic Development etc." in *Systems Thinking*, ed. F. E. Emery.

be increased by 164 per cent, housing by 111 per cent and transport by 113 per cent and questioned whether these requirements could be met within the capitalist system. The last eight years have, of course, shown that the system clearly cannot.

III

Rice's Experiments

In the late 1950s an industrial sociologist, A. K. Rice, was asked to examine the working of a calico mill in India.⁴ Studying the chaos in the weaving sheds, he found that, just as mechanisation had destroyed the traditional English mining group, introduction of the factory system in Ahmedabad had smashed the traditional Indian working unit, the family—and had not replaced it with any other organisation. Rice reorganised the sheds, reduced the number of worker grades and built new work groups; and, after some initial damage, efficiency and productivity rose. The workers also found the new arrangements more satisfying. The owners (as usual among bourgeois sociologists, Rice called them the “management”) played no part in all this, except to give formal approval to Rice’s plan; but the workers took to the re-organisation enthusiastically, especially when Rice put them all on piece work. A further interesting sidelight on the situation is that, in the beginning, the president of the union happened to be the former company chairman’s sister and the present chairman’s aunt. It was a nice, peaceful union. But more important still was the fact, which Rice mentions almost casually, that unemployment outside was particularly high. But for systems thinking specialists, Rice had achieved a stable environment.

During Rice’s first experiments there was both a boom and a slump. In the slump, the owners reduced the workforce prior to its transfer to a new automatic shed. But keeping the workforce to minimum strength only led to a drastic fall in efficiency. Not surprisingly, as any socialist could have told Rice, the workers now demanded both higher pay and a bigger workforce, both of which they succeeded in getting. Instead of admitting the reality of class struggle, Rice, the bourgeois scientist, continued to emphasise the bourgeois idea of the environment/organism interchange and the central thesis of (bourgeois) systems thinking, the stable state. Boom, slump, unemployment, class struggle were all subordinate stimuli or obstacles to the achievement of that ideal. Also the economic forces—money and the numbers of workers—were glossed over.

⁴A. K. Rice, “Productivity & Social Organisation: The Ahmedabad Experiment” (1958).

Instead, he persistently stressed the “psychological” factors, especially the creation of work-people, another aspect of the aim of achieving a stable state. Yet Rice himself was cautious about his achievements. In his *Preface* he wrote: “The results can be considered with caution as related however indirectly to the re-organisation.” In other words, he admitted that re-organisation may not have contributed all that much to the rise in productivity.

Profits Increased

His report on a later re-organisation of the non-automatic weaving shed showed clearly why the owners employed him. Because it reduced the workforce, it was attacked by people outside the factory, led by the Communists, to whom he pays a sort of tribute. But the workers inside naturally had to be content and Rice claims that, with higher pay, they gradually identified themselves more and more with management. New norms of production and wages were set, costs per loom reduced. The actual results? From 1953 to 1956 costs went up 13 per cent, output 21 per cent. In 1954 profits, taking 1948 as base 100, were down to 61. By the following year, 1955, they were up again to 102 and in 1956 to 139.

In his next book, *The Enterprise and the Environment*, published in 1963, Rice took the story up to 1960. By then an even higher steady state had been achieved. Again taking 1948 as the base year (=100), turnover had risen to 176, profits to 192. So, within the space of 12 years, profits had doubled and efficiency nearly doubled in only five years. Rice was then in a position to tackle the question of management re-organisation, which achieved a still higher steady state.

Rice admitted the inevitability of resistance to change and referred to the effect of events outside. He also glancingly mentioned that the workers inside also resisted and fell back on to the old Taylorian view that higher pay eliminated all contradictions which, of course, it does not. The workers, in fact, struggled continually against reduction of the workforce, for more pay commensurate with rising output. He also saw that automation helped to make the production system more flexible and that it compelled workers to be more adaptable and have a broader range of knowledge and skills, a fact which is now common knowledge. Automation breaks old skills and introduces new ones; and it increases productivity enormously, conning the workers into agreeing to a reduced workforce in return for higher pay for those who are kept on. The results, for example, of the classic (Esso) Fawley Refinery Agreement were that, in two years, average hourly earnings rose by 35 per cent,

productivity by over 50 per cent and £12 million-worth of plant was operated and maintained by 200 fewer workers.

Systems Thinking assists this new, advanced approach in industry. It emphasises the inter-relation between the enterprise and the environment and between technology and the system of social relations in order better to manage the workers. It is human engineering at a higher level, wider than Human Relations, more scientific than Scientific Management, combining both to bring them, so to speak, to a new qualitative level. It should not be underestimated, for its basic idea of a steady state through the building of work groups is attuned to advanced industry. But for all that, it can never overcome the basic contradiction of capitalism, the exploitation of labour-power.

Sentient Groups

In the middle 1960s Miller and Rice elaborated their theory in a book called *Systems and Organisations*. They base it on the creation of "sentient groups", i.e. groups in which there exists a feeling of loyalty and the operation of the principle of equitinality, i.e. to get the "primary task" carried out one way or another—this "primary task" being, of course, output for profit. The main aim, therefore, of the systems experts is to make the task group a sentient group, i.e. to have a "common boundary", thus achieving a steady state. This, they say, is the most difficult job.

Since they reject Marxist theory, they regard this job as primarily psychological. To achieve a steady state when the enterprise is an open system surrounded by the environment is, they admit, very difficult. Their basic aim is to get the group, ideal size about 12, to become committed to the primary task. But Systems Thinking appreciates that the achievement of self-control or self-regulation in a capitalist economy implies its achievement in wider and wider groups, so that the whole enterprise becomes a hierarchy of sub-systems with interchange and feedback. However efficiently an enterprise is so organised, Miller and Rice stick to the self-destructive notion that its primary task is (private) profit.

Moreover, capitalism—even Indian semi-capitalism—is in rapid change and steady states are more and more difficult to achieve. Increasingly, it seems, post-war industrialism is fragmenting, partly because of rapid technological change, into limited projects: a mill is to be built, hordes of construction workers, engineers, designers etc. descend on the site, spend months or years, then disperse. Systems Thinking helps

these more than previous bourgeois organisation theories in that it thinks in terms of limited steady states.

An interesting sidelight on this development of limited projects is that professional scientists, technologists and engineers are losing the sense of security they had until recently and are being forced into unionisation. It is extremely important that the traditional trade unions, especially those that are left wing, adopt as helpful an attitude to them as possible, even though they may rightly be regarded as "right wing." Reality shows that capitalism in its last stage relies less and less on the ideologists' ideal of a self-regulating system or hierarchy of systems. As the workers, manual and non-manual, demand more the capitalist class resorts more to its old, familiar weapons of economic and political constraint, mass unemployment and industrial legislation. In this developing situation unity of all employees is vital.

Systems Thinking Under Socialism

Under socialism the ideas of Systems Thinking can be and are positively valuable. A paper by the Soviet expert, Kremjansky⁵ shows the important differences between capitalist and socialist approaches. The bourgeois ideologist neglects the principle of quantitative changes leading to qualitative change and associated with this principle, the notion of levels, of different levels of complexity and quantity. The reason for this neglect of qualitative change is, as Christopher Caudwell explained in his *The Crisis in Physics*, because the bourgeoisie regards all nature in quantitative terms, quality implies revolutionary change, anathema to the capitalist class. Not so the theoretician under socialism, whose aim is to assist qualitative change in society to higher and higher levels.

Secondly, Kremjansky puts his finger, as we do here, on the bourgeois concern to achieve stable states. But for Marxists every stable state is a temporary stage in the continuous dialectical movement of nature and human society.

Thirdly, the bourgeois ideologist aims to achieve a harmonious relation between the enterprise and its environment, so that the input-output process is as smooth as possible. But, however desirable that may be, the socialist theoretician realises that there is also struggle between them and that this struggle assists the onward process. Finally, Kremjansky says that the bourgeois thinkers attempt to reduce human action to that of inanimate nature, treating

⁵ V. J. Kremjansky, "Certain Peculiarities of Organisms as a 'System' etc. in *Systems Thinking*, ed. F. E. Emery.

human labour as a thing on a level with machinery or raw materials. Humans come first and that implies that the whole of the product of their labour must, in one form or another, return to them. Systems Thinking approaches dialectical

materialism, as Lenin said of physics in 1908, but only socialism turns it from a means of exploitation into a weapon to hasten the movement to developed socialism and towards Communism.

Labour History:

Some Unemployed Struggles in the Thirties

Mick Jenkins

For 20 years—through the twenties and thirties—unemployment in Britain never fell below one million and at its peak topped three and one quarter of a million (including about half a million who had been forced off the “live” register). Capitalism throughout the (capitalist) world was in crisis and in Britain this was a period of all-round, all-out offensive to place the burdens of the crisis on the backs of the working class. Nineteen twenty-six saw the General Strike and its betrayal by the right wing reformist labour leadership. The Wall Street crash of 1929 was followed by massive unemployment, and alongside the vicious organisation, industrial warfare in defence of standards, and trade unions, there developed the equally fierce struggles of the unemployed.

Towards Three Million

Great battles were fought up and down the country. In the North West's big towns like Manchester, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Wigan, violent struggles took place. Throughout the area large forces of police were used to contain the activities of the unemployed. Many hundreds of thousands were out of work. There were towns with less people in work than out. There were town centres, local parks and street corners, where groups of unemployed congregated continuously. Poverty and suffering were widespread. Whole families were living below the subsistence level. It was a common sight to see children without socks, with broken boots or shoes, many in cheap canvas pumps and some just barefoot. For years on end clothes were handed down or passed on from one family to another. Very few working class children knew what it was to wear new clothes. Selling second-hand clothes became a thriving trade and patched trousers, patched frocks, skirts

and pinafores a common sight. Pawnshops were bulging. Bits of furniture and clothing were sold for food.

By the beginning of 1931, unemployment was mounting towards two and a half millions and by the end of the year was nearly three million. In the North West region it was around the half million mark. This was apart from the chronic short time that was prevalent in nearly all industries. Not only was the worker hit directly by unemployment, but he was also badly hit as a result of the continuous cutting of the social services both by the government and the local authorities. Genuine were the terrors and agonies of unemployment. But working people were proud, and empty tables and bare cupboards did not alter the clean windows, clean curtains, stoned front steps and the general air of working class respectability. The poverty of the people was never paraded.

Continuity of Policy

During the whole of this period the capitalist class and its governments maintained continuous attacks on the unemployed. Royal Commissions, Committees of Enquiry, Acts of Parliament, **Orders in Council**, every conceivable method was employed to lower the standards of the unemployed, to throw them off unemployment insurance benefit on to public assistance and family charity. There was “policy continuity”; Tory, Labour and “National” Governments, no matter which, carried through continuity of policy. There did not seem to be any limits to which these governments would not go to “cut” the numbers receiving unemployment benefit and so lower the standards of the unemployed.

In the main their proposals were brutal. Direct cuts in the amount of benefit; reductions in the

standard period for receipt of benefits; certain classes of workers—casual workers, part time workers, married women, seasonal workers—were disqualified from drawing benefit. A Means Test was introduced for those going on to transitional benefit—Test and Task work was made a condition for the receipt of transitional benefit. The NGSW (Not Genuinely Seeking Work) clause, 1927, put 200,000 off the register and many other orders and clauses threw hundreds of thousands off the “live” register to be harassed by appointed Public Assistance Committees (which had replaced the elected Boards of Guardians) and endless numbers of officials, of assessors, courts of referees etc., operating the Unemployment Insurance regulations, or to be thrown on to the meagre resources of the family or on to the streets.

The trade union and labour leaders refused to see the problem of mass unemployment in any other way than that of the capitalist class. They preached moderation against mass action, for the fight to be confined to Parliament. They not only took no steps to organise or defend the unemployed, but actually as a government, operated the Acts, Orders and Reports to the detriment of the unemployed and the Labour movement. The answer to this situation was the formation of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM). Its main demand was *work or full maintenance* and its most important contribution to the struggles of the unemployed was the organisation of the great National Hunger Marches.

Struggle of the NUWM

A very valuable phase of the work of the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) was its legal department. It provided representatives to defend unemployed men and women who were hauled up before Courts of Referees and Public Assistance Committees. These committees showed virtually no sympathy for the unemployed. Local NUWM leaders struggled with and mastered the Unemployment Acts, the endless amendments, regulations and the varied and complicated methods of application of the Acts. They stood up and fought the lawyers on the Courts and Committees and won thousands of cases. The national headquarters of the NUWM prepared pamphlets, leaflets, circulars, explaining the Acts and the entitlements under the Acts. They sent speakers into the localities to explain the Acts.

Just as important were the local agitation and struggles carried on in towns, big and small, throughout the whole country, which, while dominated by the national position of the unem-

ployed and the principal demand of the NUWM for *work or full maintenance*, were inevitably fought around local issues and programmes of local demands. As with the National Hunger Marches where the whole force of the state was mobilised against them, so locally all the forces of law and order were arrayed against the local unemployed, with the inevitable result on many occasions of clashes and battles, arrests, imprisonment and fines.

Salford in October, 1931

Two such battles that typify this period of struggles against unemployment were the Manchester and Salford demonstrations of the first week of October, 1931. In both cases deliberate and conscious preparations were made to provoke the demonstrations and break them up. What other interpretation can be put on the events that took place?

The background to both these local demonstrations was the National Economy Act of September, 1931, which raised insurance contributions, reduced scales of benefit by ten per cent, limited benefit to 26 weeks and imposed a Means Test upon all claimants for transitional benefit. In Salford there had been a cut in public relief at the moment when prices were rising. The local branch of the NUWM arranged for a march and demonstration on Thursday, October 1, in support of a deputation that was to register a protest and demand the withdrawal of the cuts. Nothing sinister, certainly nothing violent. Yet, when the leaders of the demonstration reached the Town Hall, they found the square barricaded and occupied by mounted and foot police with supporting plain clothes men.

All efforts to argue with the police officers about the right to enter the Town Hall and see the councillors only brought about an insistent demand for the dispersal of the demonstration. This went on for some time, then without warning, the mounted police moved forward, using their horses to force the demonstrators away from the square. “In a few moments Bexley Square was a seething mass of people.” That was in the *Manchester Evening News* the same evening. The paper reported:

“The mounted police drew their batons, urging their horses forward into the throng. ... For some time there was a pitched battle in the square. ... The whole of the area resounded with booing, screaming and hissing. Banners were flung to the ground and policemen’s helmets were knocked off. ... Many men who were pushed over were trampled on by the crowd. ... Some of the demonstrators, among whom was a large percentage of women, kicked, bit and scratched the officers. ... It took six policemen to arrest one man ...

another lay down on the floor. It took ten policemen to move him."

The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* of the same day said: "For a quarter of a mile Chapel Street was densely packed."

Eventually, because of the police plan and deliberate preparedness, and the complete unpreparedness of the workers, the demonstration was split up and cleared out of the square. Undaunted and fearless, the workers re-formed their ranks and marched to waste ground near Salford Royal Infirmary. Twelve men were arrested. On the following day, Friday, the trial took place in the court room in the Town Hall. The square was like a siege, barricaded with hundreds of police and thousands of demonstrators. But let us leave Salford for the moment and turn to Manchester a few days later.

In Manchester, too

On Tuesday, October 6, 1931, the *Manchester Evening News* carried an innocent news item, to the effect that the Manchester City Council had agreed to receive a deputation from the unemployed the following day after the formal closure of the council meeting. On the following day thousands assembled at Ardwick Green to march to the Town Hall in support of the deputation. The *Manchester Evening News*, that same night, reported:

"The procession then marched into Downing Street and walked in an orderly way towards town. A band was playing and the men waved banners and collected money. They tried to induce bystanders to join in."

A well-behaved crowd, not the slightest sign of any intention of seizing the Town Hall and appointing a new City Council! The press tried to write down the size of the particular demonstration, but estimates were that from 20,000 to 50,000 unemployed men and women, among them large numbers of young people took part.

As the procession reached the junction of Downing Street and Fairfield Street, mounted police could be seen stretched across Downing Street on the Piccadilly side. Behind the mounted police stood a double row of foot police, and behind them were tram cars, double deckers, on both sets of tram lines and on either side of the trams were vehicles of every description, moved into position by the police. By the time the head of the procession reached the cross roads the whole of the roadway between Fairfield Street and Ducie Street along London Road was completely blocked.

Batons Drawn

In front of the mounted police was a group of police officers and sergeants. The leaders of the demonstration approached them and asked what was the matter, why this terrific mobilisation of force? It was a peaceful procession in support of the deputation. They were told that the Chief Constable of Manchester had banned them from marching to Albert Square. Why? asked the leaders. It would disrupt the traffic of the whole town was the reply. But, said the leaders, you've done that yourself more effectively than if we had a dozen processions! The *Evening News* report said: "At this point a long argument occurred with the men's leaders. They were told that the City Council had adjourned and that most of the members had left the Town Hall." In the group talking to the police and using all their authority to prevent a clash were seven City Councillors. They were George Hall, Annie Lee, A. E. Jones, two councillors both named Cox, E. Hope and C. Matthews.

The unemployed leaders withdrew and had an exchange of opinion and decided to appeal to the unemployed to forgo the march to the Town Hall, and instead to march to All Saints and hold a meeting there. One of the leaders got up on the window sill of the corner pub and put the proposal to the crowd. Before he had finished speaking, batons had been drawn and were being used freely and indiscriminately. Within seconds, a peaceful slogan-shouting crowd was being batoned, pushed and shoved and forced to engage in struggles in self-defence.

"In a second the cross-roads were a welter of fighting men, of horses pushing through the struggling confusion, of policemen hitting right and left with batons, of marchers retaliating with stout sticks to which their placards had been nailed, with stones, bricks, lumps of coke. Firemen appeared and a couple of hoses quartered the crowd like machine-guns spraying water. In an incredibly short space of time after the sudden breakdown of endurance, it was possible to see the cross-roads. Broken banners, broken sticks, a wash of water, a litter of hats, caps and helmets met the eye, with here and there a man lying."

Thus reported the *Manchester Guardian* the next day.

London Road, on the other side of Fairfield Street, contained a mass of impatient unemployed workers who could see the blocked road ahead but did not know what was going on. The baton charging by the police injured many, but did not shift the crowd because of its density.

Police Harassment

The leaders of the demonstration, Arthur Jackson, Steve Nuttall, Chris Flanagan and others, were trying to guide the crowd into Whitworth Street and towards Oxford Street and All Saints. Hundreds had already moved in that direction. As the numbers moving down Whitworth Street increased, so they found they were being followed by policemen still using their batons and before long running fights were taking place all along Whitworth Street, Portland Street and in some of the side streets all the way to Oxford Street. Thousands were strung out, with the police harassing them all the way. At the junction of Portland Street and Oxford Street a large body of police was assembled.

As hard pressed groups of unemployed approached Oxford Street, so the police stationed there went into action, though some of them remained stretched across Oxford Street, guarding the approach to Albert Square. By this time the traffic in Oxford Street, Portland Street and the streets around had come to a standstill. Traffic in Oxford Street filled the whole of the carriage way and that did not allow much room for the fights and skirmishes that were taking place. The result was that many workers got hurt, and also many plate glass windows were smashed. Windows of tram cars were broken. Terrified passengers got out and found themselves entangled in the running skirmishes. Then, to the horror of all, tenders full of policemen, plain clothes men and firemen were rushed further along the road to All Saints. The whole of the southern side of the town centre seemed to be involved in chaos and running fights.

However, thousands did get to All Saints. The *Evening News* reported "In All Saints Square, thousands of men congregated. The police had made determined preparations to deal with any disorder that might arise. In addition to a big force of constables, 20 mounted police patrolled the thoroughfare." The meeting was in an indignant and angry mood. It was all the leaders could do to prevent a head-on collision with the police. The meeting was virtually surrounded by a huge force of police. "At various intervals they (policemen) altered their positions, taking more strategical points as the crowd shifted their position. Many of the policemen had been rushed to the spot in motor cars from headquarters, while others arrived in Fire Brigade tenders."

Meantime, needless to say, the deputation was split up and its members out of contact with one another. However, around four o'clock two of them managed to get to the Town Hall to register a protest at the action of the police. They had to explain that they did not know

where the rest of the deputation was. The deputy Lord Mayor, Mr. (later Sir) Noton Barclay, received them along with five councillors who took part in the march and the argument with the police.

Demonstrations Outside the Courts

News of these happenings spread round the working class quarters like wildfire and, with the appearance of the evening papers, indignation and anger rose high. In the industrial towns around Manchester the unemployed and employed workers were amazed to read of these events. The following morning the atmosphere was even more tense. Thousands of workers surrounded the Manchester and Salford Courts. The Salford case was a continuation of the trial arising out of the previous week's demonstration. The court houses were guarded by hundreds of uniformed and plain clothes police, including large numbers of mounted police. In both places more reserves were hidden in the courts and in buildings around. In all, 38 unemployed workers were tried that morning.

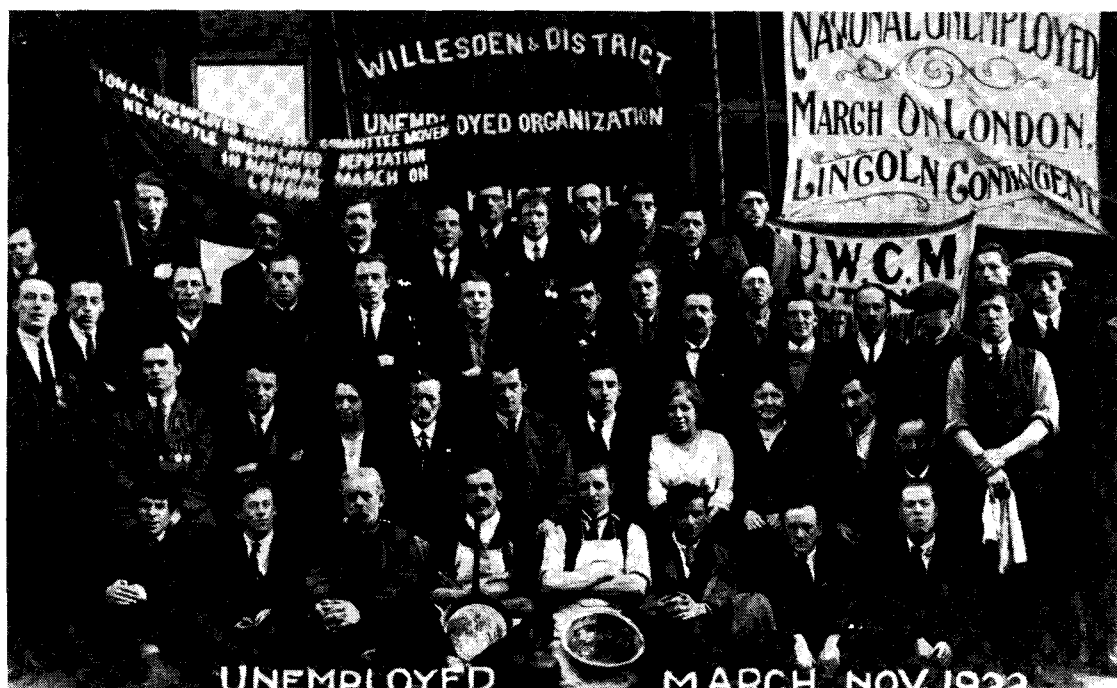
Again, let us call on the *Manchester Evening News* to authenticate this version of these events. Its editions on the day of the trial carried headlines spread over the whole seven columns of the front page, in heavy black type:

POLICE GUARD COURTS, SHOPS AND BANKS

and again over two columns in heavy black type:
BIG FORCES HIDDEN IN RESERVE

At the side of its two-column story was a photograph showing some of the mounted police used to keep the crowds in order. The police and the authorities deliberately created a civil war atmosphere and acted in that manner against the unemployed. Leading members of the NUWM and known members of the party did not dare go too near either Bexley Square or Minshull Street, Salford and Manchester Police Courts, because they might have been grabbed and charged with assaulting the police, creating a disturbance, causing a breach of the peace, or all of them combined. The *Evening News* opened its story with "Extraordinary police precautions were taken. Salford Town Hall, Post Office and Banks and leading shops were specially guarded."

Police, in large numbers, were kept inside the Salford Town Hall and the police court buildings in Manchester. Bodies of mounted police were kept within easy call. The surrounding streets in both cases were patrolled and guarded by police. Nowhere was a group of people allowed to collect; to stop for a minute with one or two



Contingents of the November 1922 Unemployed March meet in London



Hunger Marchers of the 1932 March, headed by a Women's Contingent, leave St. Pancras for Hyde Park, October 27th, 1932.



Scottish contingent of 1932 March enter a Northamptonshire village en route for London.



The South Wales contingent of the October 1932 Hunger March reach a Berkshire village en route for London.

friends was to invite a couple of quick striding policemen to come over and tell you to move on.

Ruling Class Justice

In both courts the police displayed a collection of brickbats, hammer heads, pieces of iron, stones, sticks, spanners and broken bottles. It looked as though the scrap yards of Manchester and Salford had been scoured. Charges of assaulting the police seem to have been liberally and indiscriminately handed out. "I am satisfied these men all assaulted the police. The assaults, however, were of varying degrees." So said Mr. Percy Macbeth, the Salford Stipendiary Magistrate who tried the Salford cases, according to the *Manchester Guardian*. And making the punishment fit the crime, he handed out sentences from five months to being bound over.

So outrageous was the conduct of the Salford police authorities that they did not dare announce the court verdicts until the end of the day after all the cases had been tried. They feared the crowds milling around in the streets outside. At the Manchester trial all sorts of charges of assault and battery against the police were preferred against the 26 who appeared in that court. Sentences of four, three and one month's imprisonment, and fines of 40 and 20 shillings were imposed. One of the leaders was charged with assaulting the police. He claimed he was at the Town Hall at the time of the alleged assault. He called three councillors to give evidence to prove this. Only one put in an appearance and in a letter to the *Daily Worker* he explained what happened to him:

"May I register my protest at the procedure at the Manchester Police Court on Thursday, 8th October. I personally arrived at the Court at approximately 9.55 a.m. to find the place guarded by a strong posse of foot police, the surrounding streets being patrolled by a mounted detachment. Admission to the courts was being refused and I was told that the whole gallery was and had been full for a long time. Upon disclosing my identity I was admitted into the hall, only to find admission to the courts again barred. After tramping from place to place inside the building I was ultimately allowed upstairs. Here again, a similar comedy was enacted until finally I arrived at the Court Room, having spent 40 minutes in attaining my objective. The public gallery contained five men only, and I protested at the following procedure—the repeated calling of witnesses for the defence, witnesses who obviously had been denied admission to the building, makes my point."

Wigan Demonstration

The batonings, the breaking-up of demonstra-

tions, the arrests and the sending to prison of the leaders of the unemployed had for its object the political aim of bolstering up the policy of the ruling class of placing the burden of the crisis on to the backs of the workers and the unemployed. This can be best illustrated by relating what happened in Wigan one December day near to Christmas 1931.

The agitations and activities of the local administration of the Unemployment Act were having a demoralising effect on the local administration of the Unemployment Act, so much so that the Wigan PAC decided to end the administration of Unemployment Insurance under the Means Test as soon as the Ministry could send a commission to take over. They complained that they were subject to a stream of abuse and unpopularity for having to administer the Means Test; that lies were being spread that they were depriving people of transitional benefit; that members of the committee were being stopped in the streets and roundly abused, that tradesmen members faced a drastic loss of trade and one had had a brick thrown through his window. In addition to the excessive demands on their time, they complained that the Town Council was not supporting them.

It should be explained here that the National Economy Act carried with it not only a reduction in benefit, but also a limitation of the duration of benefits to 26 weeks. After that the applicants had to apply for transitional benefit, which was administered by the Ministry of Labour Exchanges, but jurisdiction over all such claims was given to the Public Assistance Committees. It was then that the applicants had to submit to a Means Test. Whereas previously a Means Test as to individual means existed, now it was a family means test and operated with extreme hardship by the PAC under terrific pressure from the National Government. The most searching enquiries about family income and resources were made, including approaches to employers of other members of the family. All this was done under threat of legal proceedings for giving false information.

The immediate cause of the trouble in Wigan was the demand of the local unemployed that the PAC should make up all cuts in unemployment benefit to the level existing before October 12, when the Act came into force, irrespective of the family income. In addition, the demand was made for an extra 5s. per week for all adults, for 2s. per week per child and for two bags of coal per household per week. This was too much for the Wigan Public Assistance Committee.

Who Disturbed the Peace?

In the middle of December, a mid-week march and demonstration was held. It was peaceful and orderly but the forces of law and order decided they were not going to allow the unemployed the freedom of the streets, and so in a most brutal manner, they charged and batoned the demonstrators, concentrating on the leaders of the unemployed, some of who had to have hospital treatment. They arrested four leaders and banned all meetings and demonstrations. Immediately the cry went up "On to the streets", "Break the ban". The local leadership of the NUWM decided to organise a mass meeting on the Sunday evening, ten days after the baton charge.

The court case, the statements of the Chief Constable and the inevitable prison sentences followed the pattern of the period. The *Daily Worker* of Saturday, January 16, 1932, reported the previous day's court proceedings. The Chief Constable in his evidence stated:

"That is the man (Paul Farrell, one of the local leaders of the unemployed who was not on the demonstration, but was arrested on a warrant, charged with being a Disturber of the Peace, inciter of others to commit breaches of the Peace) "who is before you today. He doesn't want Peace; what he wants is mob law, but I can tell him and his fellows that there will be no mob law in Wigan, and if they don't behave themselves there will be no more demonstrations or processions and no more meetings on the Market Square unless they are carried out orderly. I tell them that now."

The *Daily Worker's* report continues:

"The Chief Constable was forced to admit under cross examination that he had police ready to charge the demonstrators in ambush at various points along the road."

"Up to being attacked by the police the demonstration was orderly and nothing happened to which objection could be taken," said Richard Walsh, official of the local Weavers' Union, who saw the police attack from his office window.

The Market Square meeting was held. The atmosphere was such that it was clear within minutes of the start of the meeting that only another baton charge would have closed the meeting and dispersed the crowd, and that was more than the police dared risk at that moment. And so the ban was broken.

Farnworth Unemployed Struggles

Sometimes the most innocent of proposals by the local authorities brought forth a storm of protest that resulted in fierce struggles and confrontation, and that at times in backwaters of

political life and activity. Something of this nature took place in mid-September 1931 in the small township of Farnworth, near Bolton in Lancashire. The Streets Committee of the local council decided to turn six casual jobs into permanent appointments. The posts were duly advertised. Eight hundred unemployed applied for the six posts. The local branch of the NUWM wanted the six jobs to remain on a rota basis. Things were so bad that six weeks' work and wages was an absolute godsend compared with six weeks on the dole. They asked the Streets Committee to receive a deputation.

A meeting was arranged to take place on the Market Square whilst the Streets Committee was in session at the Town Hall a few hundred yards away and the deputation of two was to attend the committee meeting and report back to the public meeting. Hundreds of workers congregated on the Market Square and on the pavements well before the meeting commenced. Before the meeting finished the deputation of two returned and reported that the committee was not going to change its decision.

The audience, in no uncertain terms, expressed its dissatisfaction. The demand arose for a march to the Town Hall there and then and a deputation of six was endorsed.

The people poured on to the road and made towards the Town Hall, but there did not seem to be anyone about. The deputation walked into the Town Hall and the procession followed and within seconds, scores were in the corridors, opening doors, switching on lights, shouting slogans. The side street was crammed with the demonstrators. The deputation agreed to go upstairs to the committee and try to get in. One of the unemployed opened a door, grabbed a chair, lifted it over his head and went into the street and the meeting re-started. The deputation had been allowed into the committee and one of them put forward the demands of the unemployed.

Full consideration of the NUWM's demands was promised and that the decision would be announced after the next council meeting. The six came out and one of them reported to the crowd, which again expressed its dissatisfaction. It decided to call for a special session of the council for a deputation of 12 to attend the session; for a further demonstration on the Market Square on the night, which would accompany the deputation to the Town Hall; and finally that a further meeting be held on the following Tuesday. "The demonstration was orderly throughout," reported *The Farnworth Journal*. The following day the letter requesting a special meeting of the council was sent to the chairman of the council.

"No Useful Purpose"

At the public meeting the following Tuesday, the reply from the clerk to the council, on behalf of the chairman was read. It said that ordinary committee meetings were held every Tuesday in the month and that no useful purpose would be served by calling a special meeting; the council had received one deputation and it could not go on receiving one deputation after another. The council was the only authority properly elected to conduct the business of the town and they could not submit to a dictatorial attitude in this matter.

This high-handed superior attitude on the part of the officials and those in authority was combined with unscrupulous distortion and double dealing on the part of the local politicians—particularly the local labour leaders on the council. They had no hesitation in trying to work up public feeling against the unemployed, repeating every lie the capitalist press put out. This did not prevent them from proposing resolutions in the council embodying some of the demands of the unemployed. No wonder the local Tories paid a public compliment to the local labour leader for his "adroitness and journalist contortions".

The second demonstration was met by mounted police and 100 foot police deployed round the Town Hall—imported for the occasion. Needless to say, within a few weeks at the General Election the seat was lost to the Conservatives.

The activity of the Farnworth unemployed and the discussions at the NUWM Committee and members meetings resulted in a ten-point programme being worked out. The first four demands were the national demands of the NUWM. The rest related to the local situation and was the basis for continuous campaigning.

Lessons of Class Rule

In this period the unemployed had great difficulty in getting their grievances considered by official bodies. Local councils and similar authorities invariably refused to recognise the NUWM. In fact, the Labour Government enacted some of the most vicious measures against the unemployed. The Trade Union leaders would give no support to the NUWM nor take up the cause of the unemployed. It was a period when the ruling class would not make concessions to the unemployed related to human needs. Every concession won by the unemployed had to be bitterly fought for and concessions that were made, were made from the angle of trying to stem the mass movement.

It was a period when the actions of the unemployed grew by leaps and bounds. Everywhere

meetings, marches and deputations were organised. The breaking in on BBC broadcasts from public places, the heckling and breaking up of public meetings associated with government speakers, organisations antagonistic to the demands of the unemployed, as well as the organisation of educational meetings, lectures, classes and schools, social and recreational functions went on everywhere.

Solidarity with the Employed Workers

All this work and activity, in the main, was organised and led by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. Nor was the NUWM narrow-minded in its defence of the unemployed. It gave unstinted support to the employed workers in their struggle to defend and improve standards. It always stood in solidarity with strikers. As a matter of fact, it gained an imperishable reputation as "black-leg proof". Efforts by employers to entice the unemployed to act as strike breakers in the majority of cases failed. There were cases where the employers used the Mosley fascists as strike breakers to create an atmosphere of back-to-work. From the very earliest days the unemployed fought back. Meetings, deputation, demonstrations were taking place in all parts of the country. Throughout these years, local unemployed organisations developed and early in 1921 the NUWM was formed. Of the fight back the most memorable events were the National Hunger Marches. They were feats of organisation, full of imagination and mass agitation, drawing the attention of the whole population to the plight of the unemployed. The return of the first two Labour Governments were preceded by National Hunger Marches.

Similarly, with the local agitation and struggles, valuable local concessions were won, in the operation of the Means Test and Task Work, in the right to appeal to higher committees, the postponement or abandoning of harsh PAC decisions, extra coal allowances, extra Christmas relief, an extra sixpence for old age pensioners in institutions, extra rent allowances, allowances for insurance premiums, reduction of cost of meals for the unemployed on task work etc.

Whatever the propaganda in this period about freedom, democracy, individual liberty, the culture and humanity of capitalism, it could not hide the class character of capitalist society, could not camouflage the role of the state itself. Millions of working men and women must have taken part in the meetings, petitions, marches and demonstrations. Hundreds of thousands must have taken part in demonstrations that were broken up by the police, many with brutality. Thousands were arrested and were imprisoned

or fined. The generation that was the backbone of that class vote in 1945 was the generation that experienced the great battles of the unemployed, that personally saw and felt the police charges and batons, saw and understood for whom the police existed and who and what they protected.

Whatever "victories" the Baldwin and MacDonald governments scored in those days, they were victories only in the immediate momentary sense, they were defeats in the long term class sense. The lesson of class rule consciously or unconsciously was learned by millions.

An Exchange on Proportional Representation:

Some Questions about Proportional Representation

Kath Westacott

In his article in *Marxism Today* (May 1974) on "The General Election and After" Reuben Falber said that the introduction of proportional representation would "open up the political situation," and "lead to new political thinking."¹ What exactly did he mean by that?

For many years the Communist Party has been supporting PR for two main reasons: first on the grounds that it is more democratic, and second that it would help us to get Communist MPs into Parliament. This is regarded by most Communist Party members as so obvious as to be beyond question, and there has been practically no discussion about it, either in the Party press or at National Congresses. But now the whole question of changing the electoral system in Britain has come to the fore and will soon develop into a major controversy. Since our aim is to win power for the working class through Parliament this is important for us.

The Question of Democracy

The form of elections is a tactical question and not one of principle. This means that we have to keep the question of electoral change constantly under review and recognise that our attitude may have to change according to the circumstances existing at any given time.

Comrade Kath Westacott sent us the above article criticising the Communist Party policy with regard to proportional representation. We publish it, together with a reply from Dave Cook.

But it is vital that our attitude should be based on correct theoretical principles and that no element of opportunism is allowed to creep in. In the controversies with Kautsky, the Mensheviks and others, Lenin emphasised over and over again that there is no such thing as "pure democracy", or "democracy in general", but only class democracy. There is bourgeois liberal democracy and there is working class democracy.²

The working class in Britain has a long history of fighting for electoral reform. The very fact that we call PR "electoral reform" and not "electoral change", pre-disposes us to accept it without a great deal of thought. We have allied ourselves with progressives to defend bourgeois democratic rights during the struggle against fascism and right wing reaction, but we should be making a serious mistake if we accepted their values as the standard of democracy. Their ideal electoral system is one which "represents" with

²In 1919 the German Social Democrats supported the introduction of proportional representation in the Weimar Constitution, which was acclaimed by many bourgeois theoreticians as the most democratic of its time. Lenin exposed them and considered the question of fighting for a correct attitude to democracy so important that it was one of the main subjects discussed at the First Congress of the Communist International.

Lenin—*Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, March 1919, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 457.

The Deception of the People by the Slogans of Freedom and Equality, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 339.

The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 227.

¹*Marxism Today*, Vol. 18, No. 5, p. 140.

mathematical accuracy every tiny variation of minority opinion. To a liberal, for example, a one party system and democracy are a contradiction in terms.

The literature of the Electoral Reform Society is full of expressions such as "fair voting", "equal representation", "a vote that is equal in value", "a system which is fair to all", "a free and effective choice among a number of candidates".

Communists on the other hand think of freedom and democracy not simply in terms of the individual, but of the class. As long as classes exist there can never be real equality. How many times have we exposed the fraudulent nature of their much vaunted "equality before the law"? Yet when it comes to "equal representation" we seem to have a blind spot. We accept and repeat the arguments of the Electoral Reform Society uncritically.

Equal Representation?

We say that we support PR because it will give "equal representation". But how can this be true when the parties do not have an equal opportunity of putting their case to the electors? The capitalist class controls all the national newspapers except the *Morning Star*. The Labour Party does not have a single daily paper of its own. What sort of "equality" is that? Theoretically all parties are "equally" limited in the amount of money they may spend on elections.

But it has been estimated that throughout last year the Tories and their associates will have spent £10 million on propaganda with the purpose of influencing electors.³ Television and radio play a very important part in deciding how electors vote, but they too are under the control of the capitalist class. They use their influence against working class parties, Labour as well as Communist, not only in party political broadcasts but also in news bulletins, discussions, plays, even comedy series, day in, day out, year after year.

We have always correctly maintained that the main reason Labour governments have lost support is because they have continued to operate Tory policies. But one of the lessons which we must learn from the Party's experience in Chile is that even when governments are genuinely trying to operate socialist policies, the ruling class through its control of the mass media is able to whip up hostility to them, especially among the middle strata of the people.

Comrade Falber talks about giving voters

"greater freedom to express their real wishes", but an electorate which is being bombarded by a barrage of capitalist propaganda is not really free. How can we claim that an electoral system is truly democratic which makes no allowance for this, and gives only formal "equality of representation" to the working class? This kind of democracy is nothing better than a fraud, as Lenin told Kautsky in 1918.

PR and the Party System

Comrade Falber says that we are opposed to the majority system of voting because it "favours the two big parties at the expense of smaller parties". But the National Front is not just a "smaller" party. It expresses the view of the most reactionary section of the capitalist class. The Labour Party is not simply a "big" party. It represents the organised working class movement (including ourselves through our trade unions). In the recent election if seats had been allocated strictly in accordance with votes cast, there would now be two National Front members in Parliament and 69 fewer Labour MPs.⁴ How have we got ourselves into a position where we are supporting an electoral system that will make it easier for the National Front to get members into Parliament, but more difficult for the Labour Party? And all in the name of democracy!

Proportional representation is neither progressive nor reactionary in itself. It depends on the circumstances in which it is introduced. In countries which have racial or religious difficulties PR is often the best solution for the ruling class. British governments which refused to introduce it in Britain nevertheless sometimes accepted it for overseas territories.⁵ When the progressive forces are heavily outnumbered and weakened by divisions among themselves, as in Northern Ireland, the introduction of PR can help them. But a ruling party sometimes introduces PR when it is threatened with divisions in its own ranks, and is faced with a rising working class movement, as happened in Switzerland in 1918.⁶

PR Systems

There is a bewildering variety of PR systems, ranging from the list system in Israel (where electors vote for a party list and seats are allocated according to the proportion of votes won by each party), to the preferential system in the

⁴ The total number of votes cast was 28,457,561. The Labour Party received 11,446,671 and the National Front 108,866.

⁵ E. Lakeman and J. D. Lambert—*Voting in Democracies* (pub. Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 215.

⁶ Lakeman and Lambert—*ibid*, p. 170.

³ Norman Atkinson—*Coalition talk is cover to flout people's wishes*, *Morning Star*, Oct. 8, 1974.

Republic of Ireland (where electors vote by numbering the candidates in order of preference). Apart from France and West Germany, most European countries use a mixture of the list and preferential systems. Although the second ballot is usually considered "more democratic" than our majority system,⁷ its adoption in France was deliberately designed to discriminate against the left parties and the results are far from proportional. At the general election in 1973 the Left had over 46 per cent of the votes but the Right won 100 more seats in the Assembly.⁸ In West Germany, which uses a mixture of list and majority systems, no party which receives less than 5 per cent of the votes is allowed to hold any seats, which again discriminates against the Communist Party.⁹ Perhaps this is why *The Times* has come down in favour of the German system?¹⁰ In the other European countries there is some variation in the degree to which the number of seats won corresponds to the number of votes cast, but generally speaking the list system does ensure that Communist Party votes result in the election of Communist Party MPs.¹¹

The Effects of Proportional Representation

However, there is a negative side too. "Proportional representation is not a magic wand which will change the politics of the country overnight. As European experience shows the system can return reactionary governments and also enable social democracy to flourish."¹² But it is not enough simply to state this as a fact. We need to examine the question further. How can PR contribute to the return of a reactionary government? Under what conditions does it enable social democracy to flourish? Are those conditions present in Britain today? Would the dangerous stalemate in Italy exist if they did not have PR? Was Peter Avis correct in thinking that the abolition of PR in large towns in France had actually stimulated the growth of left unity?¹³ What effect does PR have on the development of the working class movement?

⁷ *Labour Monthly*, October 1974, p. 437.

⁸ Peter Avis—*France After the Election, Comment*, March 24, 1973, Vol. 11, No. 6, p. 92.

⁹ *Marxism Today*, May 1974, Vol. 18, No. 5, Editorial p. 130.

¹⁰ *The Times*, Oct. 9, 1974, Editorial.

¹¹ E. Lakeman—*Nine Democracies—Electoral Systems of the Countries of the European Economic Community*.

¹² *Marxism Today*, May 1974, p. 140.

¹³ Peter Avis—*Argenteuil and the programme of the French left, Comment*, Feb. 10, 1973, Vol 11, No. 3, p. 42.

How effective are Communist MPs in those countries where they have been elected?

PR tends to result in minority or coalition governments, which cannot take decisive steps towards socialism, even when there is a large group of Communist MPs. For example in Sweden (which has 19 Communist MPs) "... pressure from the centre party has forced the government to adopt a series of moderate economic policies recently. Despite the Communist presence the government's situation has tended to push it towards the centre, and not the left."¹⁴

What would be the effect on Britain if PR were introduced here? The following table (based on estimates made after the February election) indicates the kind of differences that the various systems would have made then¹⁵:

	Actual seats won	List system	S.T.V. system	German system
Conservative	296	-55	-51	-49
Labour	301	-65	-56	-59
Liberal	14	+109	+111	+109
Others	24	+11	-4	-1

Two things are clear—the Labour Party stands to lose most, whichever system is introduced, and the Liberals would gain most from STV (the single transferable vote in multi-seat constituencies). The argument that Labour need not necessarily be worse off because successful campaigning on our part would increase Labour's vote, is grossly misleading. Whether the vote remains the same and the number of seats won goes down, or whether there is an increase in votes without a corresponding increase in the number of seats, Labour Party workers and supporters would be bound to feel frustrated and despondent. Indeed, many might even drop out, or turn to a non-Parliamentary road to socialism. Nor should we underestimate the effect this would have on our own members.

Single Transferable Vote

The STV system in particular has some side effects that we need to take into account. It tends to over represent the Liberal and under represent the Communist Party, because the nearer a candidate is to the centre, the more likely he is to receive lower preference votes

¹⁴ Stephen Fay—*How they cope in Europe*, *Sunday Times*, March 3, 1974.

¹⁵ Prof. Richard Rose—*An election with a result but no government*, *The Times*, March 2, 1974.

Fred Mulley—*This change in our voting system would mean less democracy*, the *Sheffield Star*, March 5, 1974.

Edward Mortimer—*Time to end the game of electoral roulette*, *The Times*, March 5, 1974, and letter, *The Times*, March 13, 1974.

from both sides. It would help the formation of a centre coalition or a centre party¹⁶ and would make it easier for anti-Communist groups to join forces against us.¹⁷ It tends to divert attention away from the policies of the parties and on to the personalities of the candidates. Since there is more than one candidate from each of the main parties it leads to in-fighting within the parties.¹⁸

According to the Electoral Reform Society one of the main advantages of STV is that it "reduces the power of the Party Machine", and eases "excessive and irksome party discipline".¹⁹ In other words, it would undermine the workers' traditional loyalty to the Labour Party, loosen the ties between trade unions and party, reduce the accountability of MPs to their constituency Labour Parties and weaken the control of the National Conference over the Parliamentary Labour Party.

And, gloat the advocates of STV, "... the single transferable vote renders it difficult for a party—even one with so high a reputation for discipline as the Communist Party—to impose its will rigidly on its sympathisers in the electorate."²⁰ The Communist Party's avowed aim is to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. For this it is necessary that the working class should be well organised and led by a highly disciplined party. Ought we not to consider whether STV is a suitable electoral form for winning working class power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat? Changing the electoral system is not a side issue, as some comrades tend to imply, a diversion away from the immediate struggle to win wage increases and social reforms. It involves fundamental questions about the central problem of winning working class power.

Communist Party and Labour Party

The Communist Party supports STV because we hope that by allowing Labour supporters to express a second preference we shall eliminate the dilemma of the "split vote". This is extremely doubtful. (For example, it ignores the fact that the order in which candidates are eliminated can sometimes affect the result, and it assumes that all supporters of left Labour candidates would be prepared to give their second preference

votes to the Communist.) But even if it were correct this argument would only be valid as long as the present relationship between the Communist Party and the Labour Party continued. How long do we anticipate that it will be before we can change it? Already our campaign against bans and proscriptions has met with considerable success. With a determined effort it would not be long before trade unions would be permitted to elect Communists to represent them at Labour Party conferences—as once was the case. This would be an important step towards ending the distinction in the Labour Party between "affiliated" and "individual" membership. The consequences would be far reaching. There would no longer be any need for Communist and Labour candidates to stand against one another in elections, for the local Labour movement would be able to select the best working class candidate without restrictions. Alternatively, the possibility could arise of achieving an electoral agreement on the basis of winning the Labour Party for left policies. When we reach this situation one of the main reasons we advance for supporting STV will have gone.

But let us be quite clear. We cannot have both. The main opposition to PR will not come from the right wing leaders, many of whom would welcome stalemate and coalition as an excuse for not introducing socialist measures. It will come from the grass roots workers. It is precisely their intense loyalty to the Labour Party which causes the dilemma of the "split vote" in the first place. But if we continue to support PR now, it will seem to them that we are placing our own narrow sectional interests above the long term interests of the working class, and joining with the Liberals and Tories to undermine the Labour Party. The bitterness caused by the split vote will be nothing compared with the hostility we shall face then. The fight for left unity would be set back a decade or more.

In the past the two-party system worked in favour of the ruling class because whichever party was in power—Tory, Liberal or right wing Labour—the capitalist system itself was safe. But now there is a possibility that the left, under the leadership of the Communist Party, might force the government to begin taking the first steps towards socialism. The more far-sighted sections of the capitalist class are therefore looking for ways to prevent this.

Tactical and Long Term Problems

Reuben Falber says, "The presence in Parliament of a fair-sized third party, even one supporting capitalism, would distort the agreed procedures." Of course. And this is exactly what

¹⁶ Lakeman and Lambert—*op.cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁷ Unionist Party—*Proportional Representation and Local Government*, p. 10.

Lakeman and Lambert—*op.cit.*, p. 190.

¹⁸ Hugh Munro—*Making sure people get what they vote for*, *The Times*, March 2, 1974.

¹⁹ Robert A. Newland—*Only Half a Democracy* (pub. by the Electoral Reform Society, 1972), p. 18.

²⁰ Lakeman and Lambert—*op.cit.*, p. 213.

they want. In the Tory press since the February election there was been a mounting campaign against the two-party system, and in favour of PR. It is now advocated not only by the Liberals but also by *The Times* and *The Economist*. A group called "Conservative Action for Electoral Reform" believes that PR "would be good for the country and good for the Conservative Party."²¹

The Economist explained how PR would weaken the political influence of the trade unions: "...the weapon of bringing in a more subservient government by a crippling strike would in practice be struck from the unions' hands."²² It went on: "The need is for prompt enactment of a system which saves Britain from the danger of extremist minority government. The present single member constituency is now becoming a liability in this regard; so it needs to be changed." *The Times* spelled it out even more clearly: "Electoral reform is required more urgently than any other measure to make sure that the Allende disaster could not happen in Britain."²³

A leading Communist said recently, "When in doubt—look at what the class enemy is saying—and doing. It doesn't solve all your problems, but it may help to assess the set-up."²⁴ At the present time some of our class enemies are saying that the introduction of PR would hold back the movement towards socialism. Is it not time for us to stop using words like "justice", "fairness", "equality", "freedom", "democracy", as shibboleths and get down to the task of thoroughly re-examining the position from a class standpoint?

How has the change in class forces affected the attitude of the ruling class to the electoral system? How deep are the divisions in the Tory Party? Is there a basis for the development of a mass Liberal Party now? How far would STV help the trend towards the formation of a centre party? What effect would PR have on the Labour Party? How would STV affect relations between local trade unions and constituency Labour Parties? Is there any real possibility of breaking down the last remaining bans against the Communist Party in the near future? In the Party itself how far is disappointment with our electoral results a factor in making us cling to STV? Are *The Times* and *The Economist* correct in thinking that PR could be used to hold back the struggle for socialism?

²¹ Letter to the *Financial Times*, Sept. 10, 1974.

²² *The Economist*—Editorial, Sept. 28, 1974.

²³ *The Times*—Editorial, Sept. 19, 1974.

²⁴ Gerry Cohen—*Labour's only way to win massive support*, *Morning Star*, March 16, 1974.

In the *Labour Monthly* (October 1974) Palme Dutt explained the problems created by the electoral system in the absence of electoral unity between the Communist and Labour Parties. He said, "This is a tactical problem of the present phase which needs to be frankly faced."²⁵ True, but we must also frankly face the long-term problem, and the Communist Party appears to be developing a split personality on this question.

We condemn the "theories...propounded in various quarters...that the minority situation in parliament represented a new advance in democratic procedure, compelling compromise, and preventing the domination of a government tied to a one-sided political outlook,"²⁶ but we support electoral changes which our opponents hope will make this situation permanent. We say, "The decisive task...is to establish a firm and adequate majority in parliament to provide the essential basis for the Labour Government to carry out a programme corresponding to the needs and requirements of the working class and democratic movement in the conditions of the present crisis,"²⁷ but we propose an electoral system under which it would be much more difficult for the Labour Party to win a "firm and adequate majority."²⁸ We call for greater accountability of Labour MPs and applaud the decisions of Lincoln and Brightside (Sheffield) to eject Taverne and Griffiths, but we demand electoral changes which would weaken the links between MPs and local Labour Parties, and would even make it easier for renegade MPs to be re-elected as independents.²⁹ We call for militant policies and the selection of left candidates, but we advocate a system which could make it more difficult for left wingers to hold their seats. In the *British Road to Socialism* we say: "What is needed is the continuous use and development of all the traditional democratic means of struggle...whether demonstration or strike, Parliamentary or extra-Parliamentary pressure,"³⁰ but we campaign for the very system which our opponents claim would reduce the influence of the trade unions on the Labour Party.

What To Do

In this situation what should the Party do?

We could either continue to support the introduction of PR, along with the Liberals and a

²⁵ *Labour Monthly*, October 1974, *Notes of the Month*, p. 437.

²⁶ *Labour Monthly*, October 1974, p. 435.

²⁷ *Labour Monthly*, October 1974, p. 435.

²⁸ *The Economist*—Editorial, Sept. 28, 1974.

²⁹ Lakeman and Lambert—*op. cit.*, p. 208.

³⁰ *British Road to Socialism*—p. 29.

section of the Tories, try to persuade the Labour movement to accept it, and hope that if and when it is introduced we should be able to get some Communist MPs into parliament.

Or we could stop advocating PR under present conditions, expose the class aims of the Liberals and Tory "democrats", rally the working class to defend the Labour Party against this attack on it, and launch an all-out campaign to get rid

of the remaining bans against the Communist Party so that it would not be necessary for Labour and Communist candidates to stand against each other.

But we can no longer carry on as if PR were a simple, straightforward question about which there can be no doubt. It is one of the most difficult problems we have had to face for a long time. And time is running out.

Democratic Rights and Proportional Representation

Dave Cook

Kath Westacott underestimates how important it is to fight to protect and to enlarge democratic rights in the struggle for socialist revolution. Although all of the rights the working class has been able to win are limited by the property relations of capitalism—for example as she points out, monopoly control of the media greatly restricts the freedom of the press—she is mistaken in dismissing these democratic rights, even when so heavily circumscribed, as "nothing better than a fraud".

The democratic rights that exist in Britain today, are concessions which the working class in the course of prolonged and hard fought actions, has wrested from a reluctant capitalist class. In Northern Ireland today the achievement of these civil rights is central for working class advance there.

Fight for Democratic Rights

Clearly the winning of these rights has not prevented the political institutions of the country from continuing to function as instruments of monopoly rule, and equally clearly a future transformation of Parliament, into an instrument which the working class and its anti-monopoly allies can dominate, will depend primarily on developments in the Labour movement, and on the relation of class forces in Britain and the world. However, this does not mean that the class struggle has vacated those areas of politics associated with the exercising of these democratic rights. On the contrary.

Why should Communists make every effort, to use Lenin's words in "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Rights of Nations to Self Determination" to win the working class "to give full effect to democracy and to link to each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in most resolute

terms"? Firstly, Communists fight to improve conditions now, not as a tactic just to gain support, but because improvements now are worth while and important in their own right. More democratic rights are very definitely "an improvement".

Secondly, campaigns to strengthen democratic rights draw together the widest unity in struggle and develop the understanding of those taking part. The space that democratic rights create enable the working class movement to flex its muscles and to grow.

Finally, and this is so obvious it is often overlooked, democratic rights once gained are not like the ability to ride a bike, something that after being learned is with you for all time. In the present era, if democratic rights are not being advanced, they are being sliced away.

The alternative to the most powerful assertion of remaining democratic rights by the working class is not a return to some "neutral" base of classical liberal democracy, but the slide towards authoritarianism. Lenin repeatedly indicated that this has been a feature of the whole imperialist stage of capitalism. In the present acute economic crisis it is even more so.

Defend and Extend Democracy

One of the main political consequences of the economic crisis is that the ruling class is now unable to both maintain its privileged position and at the same time satisfy the rising expectations of the people. This leads it to attack even those heavily limited freedoms which it was forced to tolerate in the past. At the heart of the class struggles of recent years has been the ruling class attack on the democratic rights of the working class movement, through the Industrial Relations Act, the attacks on

picketing and through attempts to revise criminal law at the expense of the accused. At the centre of the campaign against continued membership of the EEC is opposition to the surrender of Parliament's sovereignty over the economy and on foreign affairs.

Socialist society will create completely new rights for workers, which have no place in capitalist society, for example the right to participate in running one's place of work, but many of the democratic rights of capitalism will be transformed into working class democratic rights, not by being contradicted and rejected as fraudulent—but by the very opposite. At the moment capitalism can offer a formal statement of impressive sounding abstract rights; but at every turn the realities of power and wealth in society rob these rights of much of their value. Socialist society will eliminate these barriers to the effective utilisation of these rights by the working people.

In place of periodic confined and ritualised voting, socialism will enormously strengthen democratic processes to enable them to provide continual self activity and self assertion by the working class. Seen in this light the exercise of, defence of, and fight to extend democratic rights under capitalism becomes an essential pre-condition of socialist revolution and the very best possible preparation for socialist society.

In the Correct Context

Thus our response to the limitations capitalism imposes on democratic rights now, must be to do all in our power to build and develop these rights. The present electoral system is a glaring limitation on the effectiveness of the democratic right of one person one vote, and it is in this context that the campaign for proportional representation should be seen.

It is not correct to speak as Kath Westacott does, of "winning power for the working class through Parliament". This is not the approach of *The British Road to Socialism*, which states: "Political power must be won and in the struggle for power, the winning of a majority in Parliament, supreme organ of representative power, is *one* of the essential steps". In other words there will be other essential steps. It is important that we do not forget that socialist revolution will involve a totality of inter-linked struggles. The winning of a parliamentary majority for a socialist government, vitally important though this will be in British conditions, is only projected in our programme in a context of intense class conflict, expressed on a whole number of *interconnected* political fronts.

Whatever the Electoral Reform Society may say in its literature, we do not believe that the achievement of proportional representation would somehow introduce a "truly democratic" election system. What we say is that it would make it *more* democratic

and we have been saying this consistently since our party was formed.

Effects of Present Electoral System

In what ways? Firstly, the present "first past the post" method of election in single member constituencies, can produce a majority in Parliament from a minority of votes cast. More often this has benefited the Tories but in February and October 1974 the normal anti-Labour bias did not work on a national scale (although it was still devastating for Labour in Northern Ireland in February 1974, where the anti-Sunningdale Unionist candidates with 51 per cent of the votes, won 11 of the 12 seats). In other words the present system is a gamble, capable of distorting representation in favour of the two main parties, *either way*.

However, if there is an element of chance in which of the two main parties the system damages most, there is an odds on certainty that it will place tremendous barriers to smaller parties making a break through. In the words of the Kilbrandon Report, "it tends to force political expression within the limits fixed by the two major parties"—and of course this is why it was developed. Since the first steps towards popular suffrage were achieved in 1867, the procedures have been evolved by a Parliament controlled by two parties; and they function in a self-perpetuating way. Sir Ivor Jennings, a Constitutional expert, put it very clearly, "the whole constitution from the electoral process to Parliamentary procedure, assumes the two-party system, and because it assumes that system it assists in maintaining it". Of course at every election large numbers of voters have indicated that they do not support the two major parties, in fact 25 per cent of voters gave their support elsewhere in the last election.

These rules, which though unofficial, operate as rigidly as though they were part of a written constitution, are designed to maintain the grip of the two main parties, which, whether Tory and Liberal before the 1920s, and Conservative and Labour since, agree on fundamentals about the maintenance of capitalism. However although Labour Governments' leaders and ideology have been reformist, the Labour Party has remained in an important sense a class party, intimately connected to the mass organisations of the working class, and retaining the loyalty of a majority of workers.

In all elections under the present system there is therefore very powerful pressure on class conscious workers to use their vote to keep out the Tories as their main objective in an election rather than to record political support for policies they may agree with.

This undemocratic result of the electoral system bears particularly heavily on the Communist Party,

which because of its strategy and relationship to the Labour movement, regards the achievement of *both* a Labour parliamentary majority and increased votes for its own candidates as the best possible result of an election.

Single Transferable Vote

Although there are many different sorts of proportional representation used in different countries, as Kath Westacott points out (including incidentally some in Scandinavia with majority left governments) the British Communist Party proposes "that the single transferable vote form of proportional representation be adopted, and that the constituencies be regrouped into larger areas returning between three and seven members according to the number of electors in each of them". This was the proposal that we submitted to the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform in 1966.

This system would free those who support left wing policies from the dilemma imposed by the present system. They would know that if their first *political* preference votes did not achieve sufficient support to be elected, their subsequent preferences (the number depending on the number of seats allocated to the constituency) would still count towards the total of the party they regarded as their *second* preference.

Not a "Magic Wand"

Of course it is important not to overestimate the likely results of a change to a proportional representation system. As Kath Westacott approvingly quotes Reuben Falber as saying, "P.R. is not a magic wand which will change the position of the country overnight." It would be quite wrong to paint a picture of massive numbers of Labour voters inhibited from voting Communist only by the electoral system. Nonetheless it is reasonable to assume that it is among a politically conscious minority of Labour voters who most clearly see the need for a Labour parliamentary majority, that the pressures imposed by the present system operate most strongly. Therefore a small but significant increase in Communist votes seems likely to be the result of a change to P.R. at the present stage.

Kath Westacott claims that "the Labour Party stands to lose most if P.R. was introduced"; and paints a picture of the advancing left trend in the labour movement and Labour Party foundering in a morass of coalition-dominated parliaments. This is entirely unproven. In any event the present system has produced three minority Labour Governments out of seven, and a further two with tiny majorities.

Whether the electoral system was the present one, or based on P.R., Labour would still be faced with the necessity of winning the support of the huge numbers of voters, most numerous among middle

strata sections of the population, but also including millions of industrial workers, who either vote Conservative, Liberal, nationalist or who abstain. This is a political question whose answer lies in the further advance of the Communist Party and the left trend in the Labour movement and Labour Party, creating the possibilities of a majority of the population rallied to a Labour Government. Until this happens it is unrealistic to envisage any Labour Government being forced "to begin the first steps towards socialism" as Kath Westacott puts it.

Role of Communist MPs

Perhaps the most serious weakness in her argument is her failure to see that the *further* advance of the left trend in the Labour movement and Labour Party requires increasing Communist votes and Communist representation in Parliament. Implicit in her line of argument is an overestimation of the power of the left in the Labour Party *without* Communists. In fact all the evidence of the present left-right struggles within the movement show that where Communists and Labour lefts are in unity in the trade unions the total strength of the left trend is greatly increased. If Communist MPs could be elected to Parliament and similar unity achieved with left Labour MPs, the total strength of the left there would be similarly expanded.

Kath Westacott correctly points out that many on the left in the Labour Party will argue against P.R., but she makes a fundamental error when she accepts their reasoning. "It will seem to them that we are placing our own narrow sectional interests above the long term interests of the working class." This *always* is the argument of the Labour left. To it our reply must be that the advance of the Communist Party is the *only guarantee* of "the long term interests of the working class"—and this applies to representation in the councils and Parliament as much as to the circulation of the *Morning Star* and our strength in the factories. In other words we must redouble our attempts to win recognition of the need for and role of the Communist Party as an independent revolutionary party.

The Interests of the Working Class

Of course certain sections of ruling class opinion are alarmed at the advances made by the left in the movement, and are consequently looking at potential alternatives to political institutions which have served them well up until now. This preparedness to think creatively about their own interests has always been a feature of adroit tacticians in our ruling class.

With their party in disarray, and their leadership divided, following two election defeats, it is not surprising that some Conservatives, although not yet their leading circles, are toying with the idea of Proportional Representation, which previously has

been anathema to them. However we determine our attitude, not from shifts and turns by the class enemy, but on the basis of the interests of the working class, and the realisation of its socialist aims. An electoral system which would increase the

possibility of Communists being elected to Parliament conforms with this. In the lead up to the creation of Scottish and Welsh Assemblies the Communist Party must campaign powerfully for Proportional Representation.

Discussion Contribution on:

Some Aspects of the Relationship between Marxist and non-Marxist sociology

Peter Latham

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is three-fold: first, to indicate what constitutes Marxist sociology; second, to confront the view of Marxism held by non-Marxist sociology which does not ignore it; and third, to outline a Marxist approach to alternative sociologies.

2. Marxist Sociology

Marx never used the term "sociology" in any of his writings, probably because of his low opinion of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the positivist who introduced it. Nevertheless, Lenin regarded Marx as the founder of "*scientific sociology*" because hitherto "the sociologists" unable "to get down to the simplest primary relations such as those of production", confining themselves to "the direct investigation and study of political and legal forms, stumbled on the fact that these forms emerge from certain of mankind's ideas in the period in question." Thus "materialism in sociology" carried "the analysis deeper, to the origins of man's social ideas themselves" by: (1) "singling out *production relations* as the structure of society . . . making it possible to apply to these relations that general scientific criterion of recurrence whose applicability to sociology the subjectivists denied" because so long as they "confined themselves to ideological social relations . . . their science was at best only a description of these phenomena . . ."; (2) generalising "the systems of the various countries in the single fundamental concept" of "*social formation*"; and (3) providing "a firm basis for the conception that the development of formations of society is a

process of natural history." (Lenin, V. I. *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats* (1894), Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1970, pp. 13-14).

Lucio Colletti maintains that "*Friends of the People*" is "marked by the positivist culture of the time" (*New Left Review* 86, July-August, 1974, p. 17) but since Lenin often stressed the very opposite of repeatability—e.g. "*concretely* things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected" ("Letters on Tactics", April 1917, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 44-5)—he certainly did not view society as a laboratory in which phenomena could be artificially isolated and repeated, as in physics. Similarly, Colletti caricatures Sebastiano Timpanaro's defence of the late Engels: "Timpanaro's writings reveal a type of naturalism" with "single-minded insistence on the sheer physicality of man" (*NLR* 86, p. 12) asserts Colletti—ignoring Timpanaro's explicit recognition that "by comparison with the evolutionary pace of economic and social structures (and of the superstructures determined by them), nature, including man as biological entity, also changes . . . but at an immensely slower tempo. . . . If therefore we are studying even a very long period of human history, we may legitimately pass over the physical and biological level, in as much as relative to that period it is constant." ("Considerations on Materialism", *NLR* 85, May-June, 1974, pp. 3-22, p. 14). However, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Timpanaro would concur with Colletti that "there can be no production—that is, relationships of men to nature—outside or apart

from social relationships, that is relationships to other men; and there can be no relationships between men that are not a function of relationships of men to nature, in production." (*NLR* 86, p. 12)

Like Lenin, Austro-Marxists such as Max Adler saw Marx, not Comte, as the founder of sociology. As Lucien Goldmann says, Adler saw in Marx "not just a sociologist, but the creator of scientific sociology" and his conception of Marxist sociology was that it "would provide the *knowledge* of the most effective means to achieve . . . ends" (*viz.* socialism) which were "simultaneously objective (for the theoreticians) and political and ethical (for the militant)." ("Is there a Marxist Sociology?" (1957) in *Les Temps Modernes*). And it was in response to such a perspective that Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) attacked the notion of an objective sociology undialectically separating fact and value. Though significantly in the "Preface" to the "New Edition" (1967) of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukacs specifically says that he opposed Adler because of the latter's "tendency to view Marxism exclusively as a theory of society, as social philosophy, and hence to repudiate it as a theory of nature . . . emerging once more, above all in French Existentialism and its intellectual ambience. (Merlin Press edition (1971), p. xvi). Moreover Lukacs's auto-critique also stresses that in *History and Class Consciousness* "the purview of economics is narrowed down because its basic Marxist category labour as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature, is missing." (*Ibid.*, p. xvii)

3. Non-Marxist Sociology and Marxist Sociology

Non-Marxist sociology at best seeks the "incorporation of Marx's ideas" and typically claims that this "entails the disappearance of a 'Marxist' sociology." (*Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (1965), eds. T. B. Bottomore & Maximilien Rubel: Penguin Books, p. 63). The most recent example of the latter approach is John Rex's claim on the one hand that in Marxism "problems are wished away through the myth of the proletariat" and on the other that it constitutes "a legacy for those who genuinely wish to understand the structural order of the new industrial world." (*Sociology and the Demystification of the Modern World* (1974), Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, p. 87). Indeed a few pages later Rex *openly* admits the poverty and eclecticism of his approach when he confesses that his "style of theorising" comprises: "Bits and pieces . . . taken out and fitted together" so that it "lacks any conception of political change which is provided in Marxism . . . by a dynamic political economy." (*Ibid.*, p. 97) And though Rex concedes that "it may be true that there are dominant and leading institutions . . . sometimes . . . convenient to refer to . . .

as 'base' rather than 'superstructure'", he still maintains that it is "only when we look at pure forms of social relations" that "we see the base on which all more idyllic conceptions arise" (*Ibid.*, p. 98).

Such abstraction of social situations from their wider integument constitutes a caricature of such proportion that it makes nonsense of Rex's contention that he incorporates certain Marxist categories and renders vacuous the subsequent comment that he does "not really depart from a Marxist perspective." (*Ibid.*, p. 160). It is therefore no accident that the most trenchant of the many reviews of Rex's book are by sociologists who are also members of British Communist Party (See Gideon Ben-Tovim *Comment* July 27, 1974, Vol. 12, No. 15, pp. 239-40 and Ronald Frankenberg "Not Quite demystified" in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, September 20, 1974) and that the latter make clear that he does *not* understand Marxism. In this connection especially irritating is Rex's treatment of the so-called "immiseration" thesis which he presents as the sole form of capitalist breakdown predicted by Marx. For as the *Grundrisse* shows, cataclysmic breakdown was only one of a number of possibilities in the West. Hence, though Rex includes in his bibliography the article "The Unknown Marx" by Martin Nicolaus (originally in *NLR* 48, March-April 1968, pp. 41-61) he still clings to his simplistic, alleged refutation of Marxist theories of revolution. All of which suggests that Rex has *either*, not read his own reference, *or*, if he has, that he fails to understand it.

4. Marxist Sociology and Non-Marxist Sociology—Sectarian Approaches

Such attempts by conventional sociology to neutralise and incorporate aspects of Marxism raise directly the question of the relationship of Marxist to non-Marxist sociology. Thus Martin Shaw argues that: "*the greatly increased incorporation of 'marxist' ideas in academic sociology does not foretell the end of independent marxism.* Quite the contrary: it is a response to the tremendous revitalisation of marxism outside the established social sciences. Marxism expresses and aids, as no other intellectual tradition can, the enormous growth in combativity of the working class and other groups in capitalist society against the established order. . . . It is this which has renewed the impact of Marxism on the "social sciences", an impact which will be sustained only in close relationship with its active roots . . . *one does not need to be seduced by the sociological surrogate, however "marxised"* (*Marxism versus Sociology; a guide to reading* (1974), Pluto Press: London, "Introduction", emphases added).

Here the possibility of a Marxist sociology is denied and in an earlier critique of Alvin Gouldner's

The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology (1971). Shaw asserted that "the real crisis of capitalism, of which the crisis in Western sociology is a part" necessitates "not Gouldner's assertion that the sociologist must become self-aware" but rather the need "to overcome 'sociology' in the development of the revolutionary self-consciousness of the working class." ("The Coming Crisis of Radical Sociology" *NLR* 70, November-December 1971, pp. 101-9, p. 109). So Shaw regards non-Marxist sociology as completely reactionary and condemns it wholesale in a sectarian fashion commensurate with his "ultra-left" political position—he is a member of the International Socialists—whereby "sociology" is schematically counterposed to the "development of the revolutionary self-consciousness of the working class."!

An analogous fundamentalism pervades Nicos Poulantzas's contribution—related to his adherence to the Althusserian School—to his debate with Ralph Miliband. For the latter states that he is explicitly concerned to adumbrate "a Marxist political sociology" ("Poulantzas and the Capitalist State" *NLR* 82, November-December 1973, pp. 83-92, p. 85). And Miliband, correctly, in my view, asserts and demonstrates, in opposition to Poulantzas, that "there are concepts of bourgeois social science which can be used for critical as well as for apologetic purposes." ("Reply to Nicos Poulantzas" in *Ideology in Social Science/Readings in critical social theory* (1972), Fontana/Collins: pp. 253-62, p. 255).

5. Classical Marxism and Alternative Approaches

Classical Marxism makes clear that, just as conventional sociology caricatures Marxism, those such as Shaw and Poulantzas within the Marxist tradition also distort the character of Marxism—albeit in the opposite direction. For, as Lenin says in *Empirio-Criticism and Historical Materialism* (1908): "Taken as a whole, the professors of economics are nothing but learned salesmen of the capitalist class, while the professors of philosophy are learned salesmen of the theologians".

The task of Marxists in both cases is to be able to master and refashion the achievements of these "salesmen" . . . and to be able to lop off their reactionary tendency, to pursue your own line and to combat the whole line of the forces and classes hostile to us." (*Collected Works* Vol. 14, pp. 342-3). Consequently, though Lenin here refers only to economics and philosophy his comments are equally apposite to non-Marxist sociology in particular and may be viewed as a guide to how Marxists have and should approach alternative theories in general.

Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* contain formulations which also are relevant to discussion of the relationship between Marxist and non-

Marxist sociology: e.g. Gramsci defines orthodox Marxism as "sufficient unto itself" since "it contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world . . ." (ed. & trans. Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith (1971), Lawrence & Wishart: London, p. 462). Though the latter is not a claim to monopoly of truth, but rather an instance of what V. G. Kiernan calls the "more reasonable claim that Marxism, because it goes down to the deepest level of the historical movement, has a unique capacity to amalgamate or co-ordinate what is valid in all other modes of thought; its self-sufficiency consists in this faculty of organic absorption—a very different thing from patchwork borrowing. It can mature this faculty only by wrestling with other philosophies,

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and learning from them.” (“Gramsci and Marxism” in *The Socialist Register 1972* eds. R. Miliband & J. Saville, The Merlin Press: London, pp. 1-33, p. 7)

Marxism’s capacity for “organic absorption” in relation to alternative approaches is therefore in sharp contrast to the “patchwork borrowing” exemplified above by Rex (1974). Moreover, as Hoare and Nowell Smith note, Gramsci—in his scrutiny of Croce—was not *simply* concerned to combat metaphysical idealism, for “more often” he saw Croce as “comparable to Hegel as a thinker whose work could be profited from in the struggle to renew Marxist thought and liberate it from positivistic accretions.” (“Introduction”, *op. cit.*, 1971, p. xxii) In other words, as Kiernan also emphasises, Marxism “cannot generate all its intellectual capital out of its own resources” (*op. cit.*, 1972, p. 7) and which is why Gramsci attacked Nikolai Bukharin’s *The Theory of Historical Materialism, A Manual of Popular Sociology* (first published in Moscow in 1921) for “presenting the philosophical doctrines of the past as all equally trivial and banal” (*Notebooks, op. cit.*, 1971, p. 470).

6. Implications

The implications for Marxist sociology today of such an approach to non-Marxist sociology is demonstrated by one Marxist sociologist’s recent estimate of the increasingly influential phenomenological and ethnomethodological perspective: it is a “powerful tool of demystification” says Pradeep

Bandyopadhyay, and “such research has its place as an enclave of concrete situational analysis within . . . inclusive models of determinate structures which limit and condition the boundaries of situational interaction.” (“One Sociology or Many: Some Issues in Radical Sociology” in *The Sociological Review*, February 1971, pp. 5-29, p. 19.) For it is significant that Rex (*op. cit.*, 1974), though providing a useful critique of phenomenological approaches—fails to extricate anything from, yet also transcend, them, as does Bandyopadhyay. Only Marxist sociology is able to “master and refashion the achievements” (Lenin) of Rex and other non-Marxist sociologies: it is this capacity of both classical and current Marxist sociology with its dictum to “read critically the Marxist critiques” (Frankenberg, *op. cit.*, 1974) and non-Marxist sociologies which enriches Marxist sociology and thereby ensures its viability and combativity.

Finally, “the actual social practice of the proletariat” is the basis on which sociologists’ “aligning themselves with the vantage point and interests of the proletariat can uncover truths not uncovered from the positions of the dominant class” because of “the ‘limited horizons’ of such a position, its inability to see the historically temporary nature of its dominance . . .” (Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.*, 1971, p. 19). In the pursuit of the latter project the use of certain categories formerly used for apologetic purposes are turned into their opposite and utilised in the elaboration of “fully-fledged” Marxist problematics.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS (concluded)

ORIGIN OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

We have just received from Moscow a new book by Professor Yu. I. Semyonov entitled “The Origin of Marriage and the Family”¹⁰.

The chapters of his book deal with such subjects as: Study of Marriage and the Family before the work of Morgan; How Morgan Developed his Scheme of the Evolution of Marriage and the Family; Morgan’s Scheme and Contemporary Scientific Data; from Promiscuity to Group Marriage; Group Marriage; The Origin and Evolution of Pairing Marriage and the Pairing Family; The Origin and Evolution of Monogamy.

The book is, of course, in Russian. We are sure it will be of interest to many of our

readers and we hope later in some or other form to be able to inform them of the main contents.

ISAAC DEUTSCHER PRIZE

The Jury of the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize (who include Perry Anderson, E. H. Carr, Tamara Deutscher, Eric Hobsbawm, Monty Johnstone and Ralph Miliband) have awarded the 1974 Prize to Maxime Rodinson for his book “Islam and Capitalism”.

The English translation of the book was published by Allan Lane earlier this year.

The prize for 1975 will be awarded this autumn, and works (published or in typescript) should be submitted by May 1¹¹.

¹⁰ Prof. Yu. I. Semyonov—“Origin of Marriage and of the Family”, Misl Publishing House, Moscow, 1974.

¹¹ To Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize, c/o Lloyds Bank, 68 Warwick Square, London, S.W.1.

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